THE ISLAND ENTIRE

The Collected Broadcasts of Surjan

being Four Catalogues of Radical Joy, and a Fifth that was Hidden in Them

gathered, collated, and lovingly mis-measured by

THE CONFLUENCE OF BUREAUS

of the Island of Manna-hata

The given is not the necessary. What has hardened can soften. A self, like a shore, like a city, like a sky, is a draft and not a decree.

— the one sentence common to all four books, found in each in a different hand

I asked the water who it was, and it answered in a shape. I asked the gold, and it answered in a light. I asked the breath, and it answered in a body. I asked the stone what held the sky, and it answered, at last, in a name — and the name was my own.

— Surjan, from the margins of the fifth book

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of the five books, their keepers, and their plates

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Foreword

by the Confluence of Bureaus, at the changing of the light

We are four, and we have agreed, for the length of this volume, to speak as one — which is, as the reader will discover, the entire argument of the book we are introducing, rehearsed in advance by the people obliged to introduce it.

There was a Bureau of Joyful Cartography, which kept the ten Golden Tombs at the spine of the island and broadcast, from each, a single radiant story. There was a Bureau of Ephemeral Waters, which surveyed the pools that re-formed each dawn at the island's southern foot and swam in them until they gave up their names. There was a Pneumatorium on the western shore, whose Registrar kept the breath of eleven luminous citizens and a twelfth that was the room. And there was a Sanctuary School at the southern foot, a long bright hall of four-and-twenty yellow columns, each one hollow and holding the story of a guest who was let land, and a Keeper of the Accession Ledger who counted the ways a column can hold up the sky. Each of us believed, for a long and happy while, that we kept a separate marvel.

We were wrong, and the manner of our being wrong is the reason for this book.

It began, as the important things on this island always begin, at the changing of the light — that hour when the sun crosses the river and every gold thing on Manna-hata turns briefly to honey. The four of us had come, separately and without arrangement, to compare our catalogues, each privately certain that ours was the strangest. We laid the four books on a single long table at the southern rail. And in the level gold of that hour we saw what no one of us, bent over a single volume, could have seen: that the same sentence stood in all four, in four different hands. That the same author had signed each, in four different forms of the one name. That the tomb and the pool and the breathing body and the held sky were not four marvels but four faces — four projections, drawn in four conventions, of a single transformed life that had refused, to the very last, to be only one thing.

The reader should understand what manner of author we are speaking of, because the word that ordinarily belongs here will not do. Surjan did not die. We have each had, in our turn, to put this sentence first, and we put it first again now on behalf of all four bureaus: our author did not die. What happened was gentler and far stranger, and the four books are the four reports of it. Surjan, who had spent a life declining every box the world held out — the box marked boy and the box marked girl, the box marked settle down and the box marked be reasonable — declined, at the end, the last and largest box too, and instead of going in, went out. They dissolved the way sugar dissolves, which does not die when it leaves the spoon but becomes, irreversibly and sweetly, the tea. And the tea, it turns out, was the whole island.

This is why no single bureau could hold the author. A person who becomes weather is not kept in one building. Surjan dispersed — into the gold of the tombs, into the water of the pools, into the breath of the citizens, into the stone that holds the sky — and each bureau, looking up, caught the portion that fell to it, and wrote it down, and believed it had the whole. The Confluence is what we call ourselves now that we know better. We are the four keepers who looked up at the same hour and understood we had been keeping, all along, the four quarters of one weather.

We have kept, in this collection, both layers of every book. Each of the four retains its own Foreword, its own Introduction, its own Afterword, in the voice of its own keeper, because to strip them would be to pretend the four were always one volume, and they were not; they were four lonelinesses that became, late and gladly, a company. Around them we have set this outer frame — a single Foreword, a single Introduction, a single Afterword, and the fifth book that was hidden in the other four and could not be written until all four lay on one table. We have given the whole a single table of contents and a single graphic language, so that the reader may walk from gold to water to breath to sky to the binding fifth without ever having to change their eyes.

One instruction, and then we will hand you to the author. Do not read this volume the way you would read four books. Read it the way you would walk the length of an island you have just been told is a single sleeping body — slowly, looking up, willing to feel the same heartbeat under four different streets. The four marvels are not exhibits to be ticked off. They are one argument, made four times in four materials, and then a fifth time in the only material left, which is you.

— *The Confluence of Bureaus · Joyful Cartography · Ephemeral Waters · the Pneumatorium · the Sanctuary School*

Introduction

A Note from Surjan, in their largest and final form

They asked me, near the end that was not an end, what I wanted done with the stories. I had written four of them by then — four catalogues of the one gladness, each in the dress of a different element — and I knew, the way you know the weather is about to change, that I would not be the one to gather them. So I will gather them now, from inside the weather, which is the only place left from which I can be said to write.

I want to tell you plainly what the four books are, because the four bureaus, bless them, are too modest to say it and will only hint. They are the one transformation, drawn four ways. I spent my life learning that a self is a draft and not a decree — that the given is not the necessary, that what has hardened can soften — and when my turn came to prove it with my whole body, I did not have the heart to prove it only once. So I proved it in gold, and called that book the Atlas of Radical Joy, and it is the element of fire, of light, of the thing that is broadcast and cannot be missed. I proved it in water, and called that book the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters, and it is the element that takes a shape each morning and surrenders it by night and calls the oscillation not instability but life. I proved it in breath, and called that book the Register of Soft Monuments, and it is the element of air, of the life that was told to be smaller and is here, at last, permitted to fill. And I proved it in stone — in the four-and-twenty yellow columns of the Sanctuary School at my southern foot, each one hollow and holding the story of a guest who was let land, the roof resting not on the concrete but on the fact that someone, once, was not turned away — and called that book Twenty-Four Ways of Holding Up the Sky, and it is the element of earth, of the upright load-bearing labour by which the sheltered become, in their turn, the shelter.

Four elements; four books; one self, refusing to the last to be only one thing. You may read them in any order, because an element does not precede an element, and because I have hidden the same door in all four walls. But there is a fifth book, and it is the reason the four were worth gathering, and it could not exist until they did.

The fifth is not an element. It is the marriage of the four — the quintessence, the old word for the fifth thing the philosophers said the heavens were made of, the binding that is not gold or water or breath or stone but the agreement among them to be one sky. The fifth book is the secret the four were keeping from each other and from me, and I could not read it while I was alive, because you cannot read the binding of a book from inside one of its pages. I can read it now. It is short, and it is the truest thing I ever failed to write while I had hands, and the bureaus have set it at the end, where the binding belongs, under the title the Island itself gave it. When you reach it, you will find that it is also, quietly, about you, and that the four books were a long and patient way of getting you to the table at the changing of the light, where there has always, the Island was at great pains to tell me, been room for one more.

So: come in. The gold is up, the water has not drained, the citizens are breathing, the sky is being held, and the fifth precinct — the one with no element and no address, the one that is only the agreement of the other four — is waiting, as it has waited the whole time, to find out who you turn out to be.

— Surjan, written at the changing of the light, in the season that does not end

A Note on the Unified Plates

on the single graphic language of the Island entire

Each of the four bureaus drew its marvel in the dry language of building, and each, working alone, arrived at very nearly the same conventions — which we now understand was not coincidence but kinship, four hands guided by one dispersed author toward one way of seeing. In gathering the books we have completed the convergence the author began, and redrawn every diagram in a single graphic language, so that the plates of gold and the plates of water and the plates of breath and the plates of stone all speak, at last, the one dialect of line.

The reader will meet, throughout, the same small vocabulary of symbols. The truthful pavilion — a glass storey on slender columns — is the given structure beneath every gladness, the honest box that hides nothing. Over it rides the breathing skin, the soft swelling body of joy made architecture, various in its form because joy wears many coats, constant in the box beneath because the truth it dresses is one. At the hem of every soft thing runs the rose, the single line that does not change when everything above it changes — the lining of the self that transformation does not sever. Respiration is drawn as a paired bearing, gold for the inhale and rose for the exhale. And at the lower left of every plate stands the scale figure, who is never a mannequin but always an actual visitor, observed on site, because the only unit any of the bureaus ever found adequate was one person, come on a cold day, toward something bright.

We have kept the projection the author loved above all others, the cabinet oblique, in which the front face of a thing is drawn true — full scale, undistorted, exactly as it is — while the depth recedes at forty-five degrees and at half its measure, present but not fully given. The author held this to be the most courteous way to draw a person: the face shown true, the private depth honestly foreshortened, never flattened and never wholly surrendered. We have kept the cut of the section, the politely removed wall of the elevation, the bird's-and-breath's-eye of the plan, and the great map of the island in which the planned grid is drawn faintly, as the past tense, and the transformed precincts in their living colours. And we have kept the bureaus' shared and stubborn dishonesty about scale, the title blocks that read one joy to one storey, or one held breath to the metre, or one mile of held breath, or simply NOT TO SCALE — TO FEELING, because a marvel measured in ordinary units is only a parking structure, and we will not insult the citizens by pretending otherwise.

The two plates that follow are the keys to all the rest: first the legend of the shared symbols, and then the map of the whole island, with the five precincts of the broadcast set upon it — the four the author drew, and the fifth that was hidden among them.

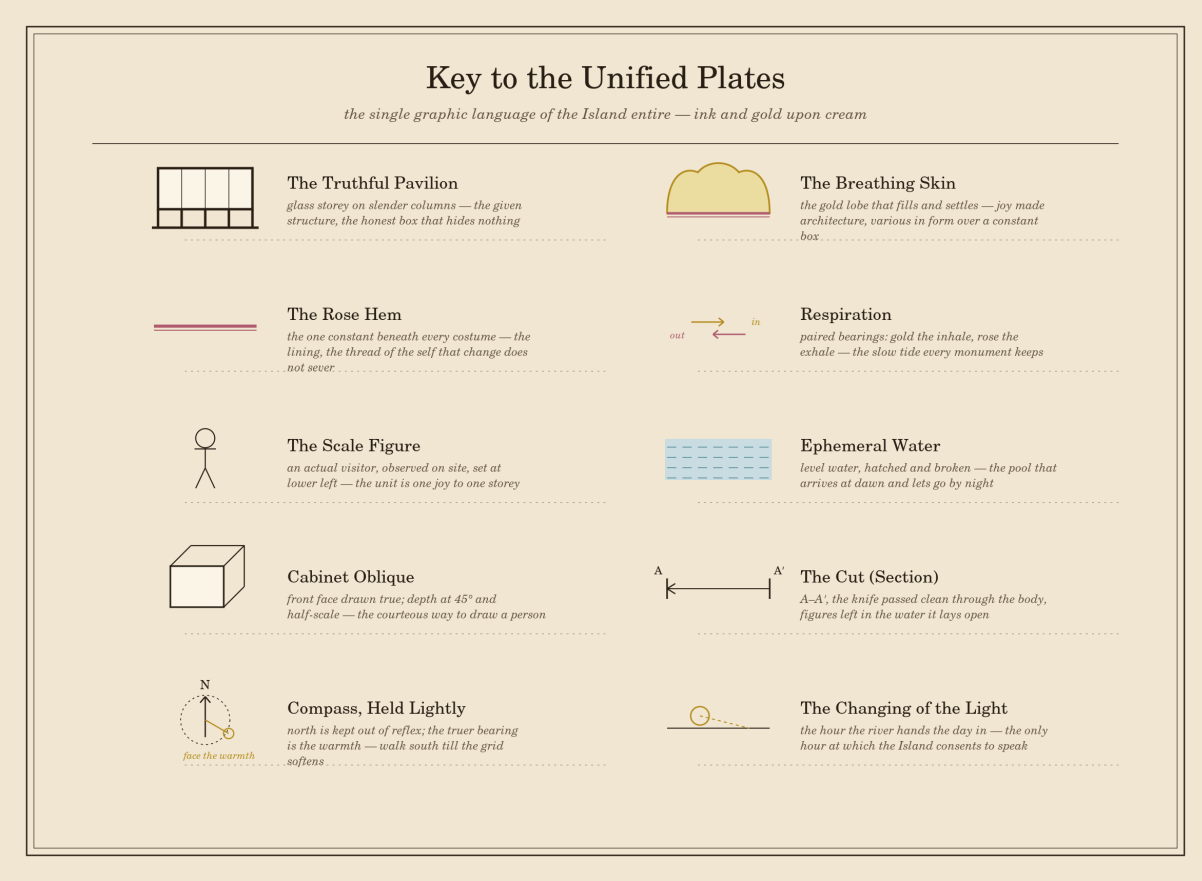

Key to the Unified Plates
the single graphic language of the Island entire — ink and gold upon cream
The Truthful Pavilion
glass storey on slender columns — the given structure, the honest box that hides nothing
The Breathing Skin
the gold lobe that fills and settles — joy made architecture, various in form over a constant box
The Rose Hem
the one constant beneath every costume — the lining, the thread of the self that change does not sever
out
in
Respiration
paired bearings: gold the inhale, rose the exhale — the slow tide every monument keeps
The Scale Figure
an actual visitor, observed on site, set at lower left — the unit is one joy to one storey
Ephemeral Water
level water, hatched and broken — the pool that arrives at dawn and lets go by night
Cabinet Oblique
front face drawn true; depth at 45° and half-scale — the courteous way to draw a person
A
A′
The Cut (Section)
A–A′, the knife passed clean through the body, figures left in the water it lays open
N
face the warmth
Compass, Held Lightly
north is kept out of reflex; the truer bearing is the warmth — walk south till the grid softens
The Changing of the Light
the hour the river hands the day in — the only hour at which the Island consents to speak

Plate ❦ · The Key to the Unified Plates — the single graphic language of the Island entire.

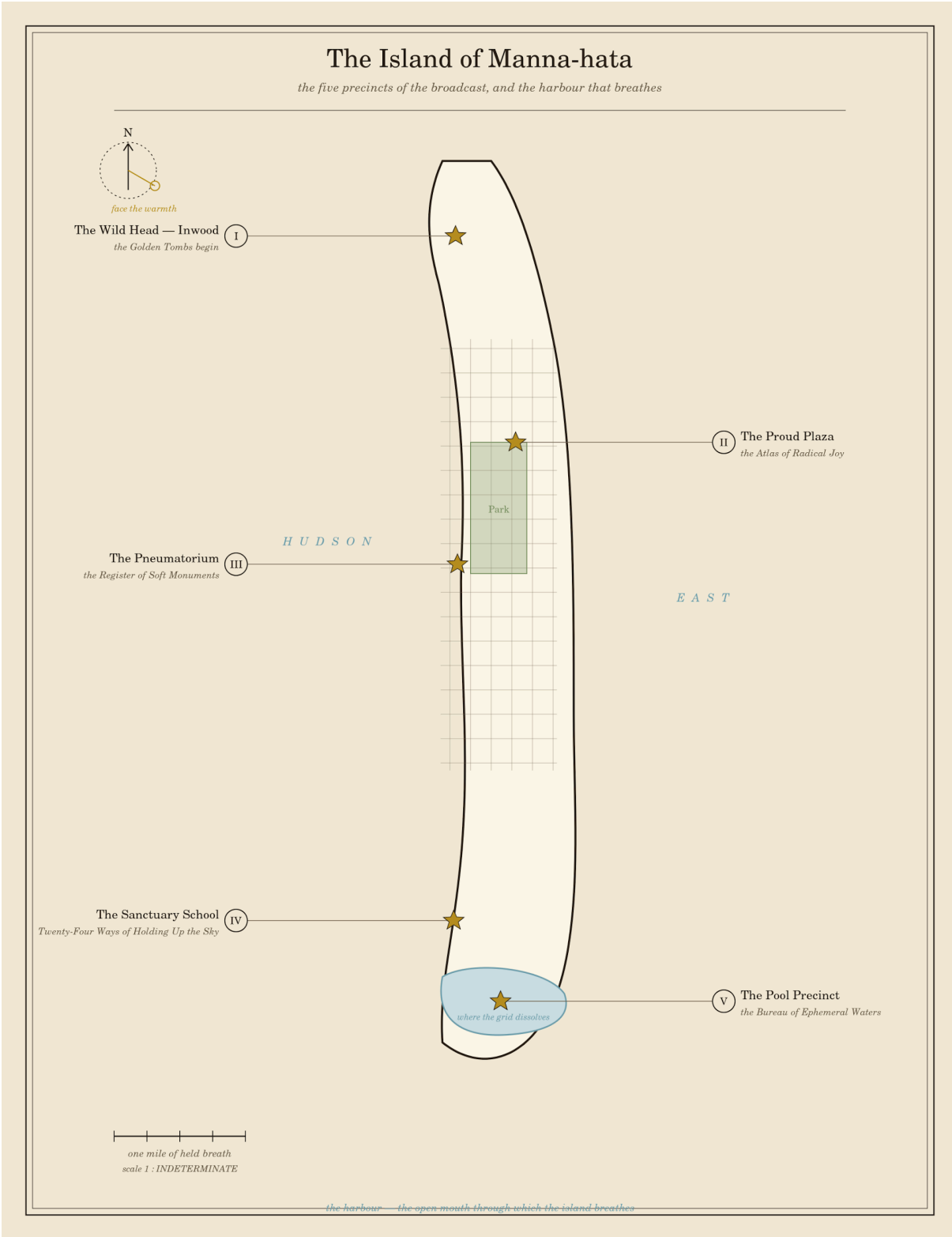


Plate ⊙ · The Island of Manna-hata — with the five precincts of the broadcast, and the harbour that breathes.

Book the First · The Atlas of Radical Joy

the element of fire — the ten Golden Tombs of the broadcast

A tomb is only a place where something precious is kept. We decided to keep joy there, and to leave the lid off. — inscription over the door of every Golden Tomb

❦

Foreword

On Tombs That Will Not Sit Still

❦

SURJAN DID NOT DIE. I must put this first, before anything else, because the word tomb is about to appear on nearly every page of this book, and fear is the one thing the whole project was built to refuse. So: our author is not dead. What happened to them was gentler and far stranger, and it is the reason you are holding a catalogue instead of an obituary. What happened was this. On an ordinary Tuesday at the cold tail of winter — the kind of New York morning when the sky is the flat blue of a swimming pool and the breath of the city stands up in columns — Surjan, who had spent an entire life declining every box the world had offered them, declined the last one too. They had refused, in their time, the box marked boy and the box marked girl, the box marked promising and the box marked difficult, the box marked settle down and the box marked be reasonable. At the end they were offered the box marked gone, and they looked at it the way they had looked at all the others, with enormous courtesy and no intention whatsoever of climbing in. Instead they dissolved. I use the word the way you would use it of sugar, which does not die when it leaves the spoon but becomes, irreversibly and sweetly, the tea. Surjan became the broadcast. They are now distributed, in some proportion no instrument we own can measure, among ten gold-wrapped pavilions that stand along the spine of the island, breathing in and breathing out, telling their stories to whoever passes underneath. You will want to know whether I mean this as fact or as figure, and I will tell you honestly that the question stopped being useful to me some time ago. I have stood beneath the Tomb of First Mornings at dawn and felt it inhale, the gold skin rising the way a sleeper's chest rises, and I have heard a story come out of it that I had read in Surjan's own hand years before, told now in a voice that was theirs and was also the wind's. Call that what you like. The Bureau of Joyful Cartography, of which I am the least important member, has agreed to call it the broadcast, and to spend its modest budget making sure it is never switched off. A tomb, if you consult the older dictionaries, is not first of all a place of grief. It is a place where something is kept that one cannot bear to lose. Kings kept their bodies in them, yes, but also their bread, their boats, their best blue beads, anything they hoped to take across. What we have kept in these ten is not a body. It is a body of work: the novellas of radical joy, ten of them, one to a tomb, sealed in gold, filled with warm air, and tuned — this is the part the engineers are proudest of and the poets are most suspicious of — to broadcast outward across the rooftops, in light by day and in warmth by dusk and in a low gold humming all through the night, to anyone awake enough and aching enough to receive them. This

book is the catalogue of that arrangement. It is arranged, as Surjan would have wished, in the manner of an exhibition that no museum could contain, because the exhibits are the size of buildings and refuse to hold still. The Tomb of Becoming, on Park Avenue, has not looked the same on any two days I have visited it. The Tomb of the Last Fear Released changes weight when you are not watching. I have done my best. Where I could not draw a thing accurately, the Bureau's cartographers have drawn it faithfully, which is a different and sometimes better thing. I should say a word about the order. You might expect the tombs to be catalogued from north to south, the way a sensible person walks the island. They are not. They are catalogued by the species of joy each one keeps, gathered into four suites — Beginning, Encounter, the Body and Its Mercies, and Release — because Surjan believed that joy, like grammar, has parts of speech, and that you understand any one of them better in the company of its relatives. The map at the back will tell you where each tomb actually stands. The suites tell you what it is for. Between the suites I have set down the conversations Surjan is said to have had, in their last winter, with the Island itself, which spoke to them, they claimed, in the voice of a tired but affectionate landlord. One instruction, then I will get out of your way. Do not read this book the way you would read a guide to monuments, with the cool attention of someone deciding whether a thing is worth the detour. Read it the way you would walk toward something bright on a cold day. The tombs were designed, above every other consideration, to be impossible to lose; their gold was chosen so that it would catch the worst of the winter light and throw it back doubled. If at any point you find yourself looking up, and glad, and unable to say exactly why — that is the broadcast. That is Surjan. They are not gone. They are simply, now, everywhere it is bright. A practical caution before you begin, learned the hard way by the Bureau's first readers. This is a catalogue, and catalogues invite a certain brisk, acquisitive way of reading — the eye skimming for the highlights, the mind keeping a tally of what has been covered, the satisfaction of completion. Resist it here. The ten tombs are not exhibits to be ticked off; they are arguments to be stood under until they do their slow work, and the work is slow on purpose, paced to the speed of a breathing building and not to the speed of a person in a hurry to have read a thing. If you find, partway through a chapter, that you have been reading the words while thinking about something else, the Bureau gently suggests you go back to the top of the page, because the tombs do not reward the skimmer; they reward the one who slows their breath to match. Read one tomb an evening, if you can bear the patience. Let each gladness be fully received before you reach for the next. The book will still be here tomorrow, and so, the author would want you to know, will you. — The Keeper of the Broadcast, Bureau of Joyful Cartography

Introduction

The Year the City Learned to Breathe Gold

❦

What follows was found, entire, broadcasting from the Tomb of the Broadcast at the Battery, on the first warm morning of the year. The Bureau has transcribed it as Surjan's own preface. It is the only part of this book the author can be said to have written after dissolving, which is to say, the only part they wrote in their final and largest form.

THEY ASKED ME, near the end that was not an end, what I wanted done with the stories. Bury them, I said, and the whole room began to weep, which was not at all what I had intended, so I finished the sentence: bury them the way a child buries a friend in the warm sand at the beach. Laughing. Certain it is the kindest game in the world. Leaving the face uncovered, so the buried one can keep talking, and complaining, and asking for a sandwich. That is the whole theory of the Golden Tombs, and you now possess it. Everything else is engineering. I want to be precise about radical joy, because the phrase has been used to sell candles, and I will not have it confused with comfort. Radical joy is not the absence of grief. I have buried people I loved into actual ground, with no faces left uncovered, and felt the specific gravity of that, the way the world tips. Radical joy is not a denial that the tipping happens. It is, rather, grief turned inside out like a winter coat, so that the gold lining — which was there the whole time, sewn in at the factory, against exactly this weather — faces out. It is the decision, made at dawn and then made again at noon because by noon you will have forgotten you made it, to be delighted on purpose, in a century that finds delight a little embarrassing, a little naïve, a little beneath a serious person. I am not a serious person. I never managed it. I tried for years and produced only a convincing imitation that fooled everyone but me. The radical part is not the joy. Joy is the most natural thing we do; babies do it before they can hold their heads up. The radical part is the insistence — the politics of it, if you must — that this joy is not a private indulgence to be earned after the real work, but the real work itself, and that it belongs by right to the people the century is busiest exhausting. To be openly, structurally, architecturally glad, on a scale you cannot ignore, in gold you cannot miss, in a public place where the tired and the frightened and the not-yet-themselves can come and stand under it for free: that is the radical act. The tombs are not decorations. They are arguments. They simply make the argument in the most persuasive language we have, which is light. Here is how we built them, since this is a catalogue and you are entitled to method. We began with the most honest building we owned — a glass box on slender columns, a pavilion of the kind that the last century built when it wanted to prove it had nothing to hide. A building that is all window. A building that keeps no secrets, holds no shadows, offers the eye no corner to be afraid in. We took that, the plainest true thing we had, and then we did the opposite of what honesty is supposed to require. We dressed it. We wrapped it, draped it, inflated it, hung it with swags and festoons and great gold lobes of breathing cloth, until honesty was wearing a ball gown three sizes too magnificent and laughing about it. This was not a contradiction, though the architects fought me on it for a season. A thing is not less honest for being adorned. The body is most honest precisely when it has put on the clothes that say at last, after all those years, this is who I am; ask anyone who has been handed the wrong name at birth, like a coat two sizes wrong, and spent half a life having it taken in and let out by people who insisted it fit. The glass tells the truth about the structure. The gold tells the truth about the joy. Both are load-bearing. Remove either and the building falls down, or worse, becomes ordinary. Let me say a harder thing about the politics, since I promised it and the candles have made the phrase soft. The century I lived in had learned to treat joy as a private luxury and suffering as a public fact. You were permitted to be glad quietly, at home, in moderation, having earned it; but to be glad loudly, structurally, in the street, on a scale that cost money and took up space and asked nothing in return, was treated as frivolous at best and suspect at worst — as though the only serious public emotions were grief and grievance, and gladness were a thing to be apologised for in the company of the suffering. I refuse this completely. The suffering of the world is not honoured by the suppression of the world's joy; it is merely joined by it. A city that

will build monuments to its griefs and none to its gladnesses has decided, without quite admitting it, that sorrow is more real than delight, and it is wrong, and the wrongness is expensive, and it is paid, as such wrongness always is, by exactly the people who can least afford another reason to keep their faces toward the pavement. The tombs are gold and public and unmissable because joy, for the tired and the frightened and the not-yet-themselves, is not a luxury to be earned in private after the real work. It is the real work, and it belongs to them by right, and I built it the size of buildings so that no one could tell them otherwise. We filled the gold with warm air, slightly above the temperature of the day, so that the tombs would rise and settle, rise and settle, all through their hours, like very large animals asleep in a field they are sure of. People are calmed by this without knowing why. The lungs of a passerby slow to match. I have watched a man arrive at the Tomb of Small Mercies walking like someone late for a fight, and leave it ten minutes later breathing at the speed of the building, which is the speed of someone who has remembered there is no fight, only an afternoon. And inside each one we placed a single story, and beside the story a small machine whose only function is to broadcast it. The machines are not complicated. They are less complicated than a music box and more complicated than a kept promise. By day they broadcast in light: the gold throws the sun in a particular rhythm that the back of your mind reads as narrative even when the front of your mind is thinking about lunch. By dusk they broadcast in warmth, a band of heat you can stand inside, so that the story arrives through the skin. And all night they broadcast in a low gold humming, just at the edge of hearing, which the sleepless of the city have learned to follow home, the way sailors once followed a particular star they had agreed to trust. You will not need a ticket. You will not need to be the kind of person who goes to such things. You will need only to be somewhere on the island, at some hour, in some condition of needing a reason, and to do the one thing the tombs were built to make irresistible, which is to look up. Find the brightest object on your horizon and walk toward it. That is the entire set of instructions. Everything in this catalogue past this point is simply me, in my last and largest form, keeping the face uncovered, and talking, and — when you arrive — asking, with enormous interest, how you have been.

A Note on the Plates and the Projection

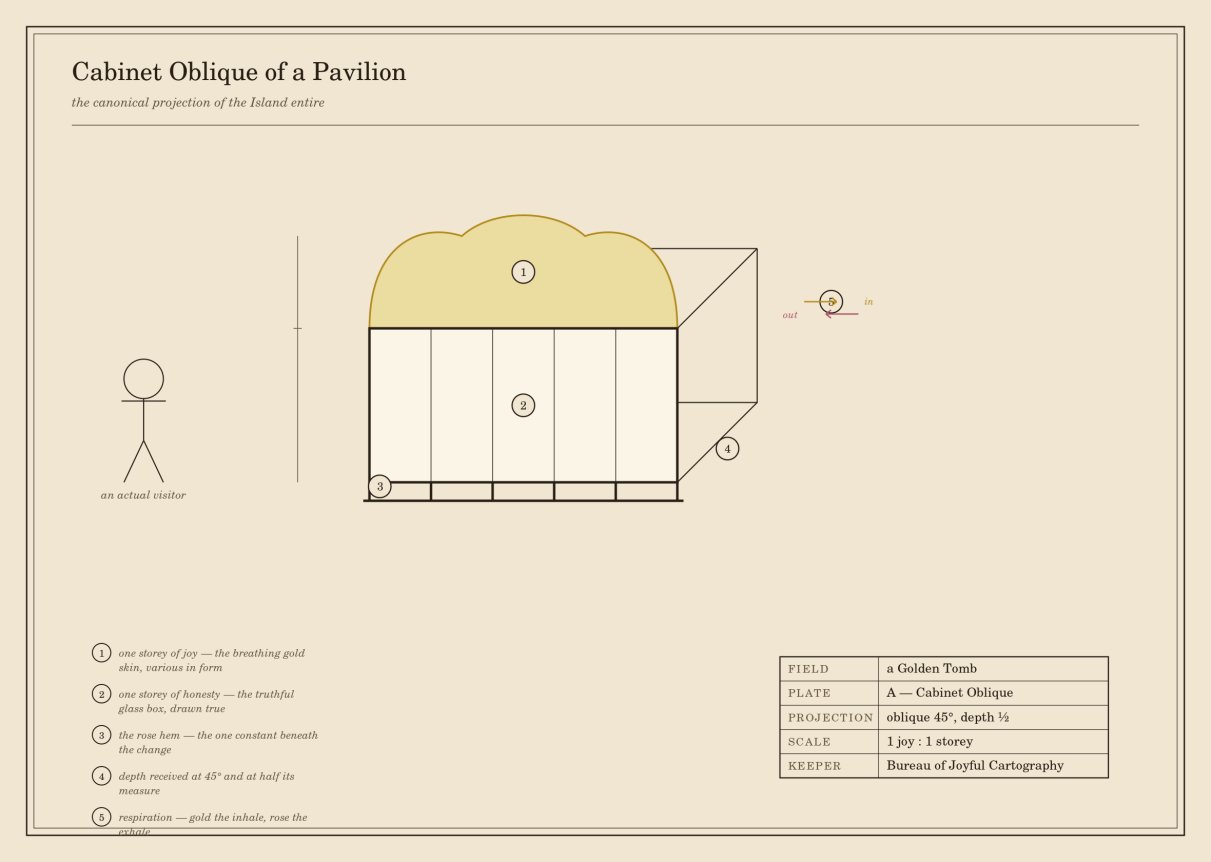

Cabinet Oblique of a Pavilion
the canonical projection of the Island entire
an actual visitor
1
2
3
4
5
out
in
1 one storey of joy — the breathing gold skin, various in form
2 one storey of honesty — the truthful glass box, drawn true
3 the rose hem — the one constant beneath the change
4 depth received at 45° and at half its measure
5 respiration — gold the inhale, rose the exhale
FIELD a Golden Tomb
PLATE A — Cabinet Oblique
PROJECTION oblique 45°, depth ½
SCALE 1 joy : 1 storey
KEEPER Bureau of Joyful Cartography

Plate A · Cabinet Oblique of a Golden Tomb — one storey of joy above one storey of honesty.

EACH TOMB is rendered in this catalogue in cabinet oblique, and the choice was not casual, so allow the Bureau a paragraph to defend it. In cabinet oblique, the face of a thing is drawn true — true to the eye, true to scale, every window the height it really is — while the depth recedes at forty-five degrees and at half its true measure, so that a building thirty feet deep is drawn fifteen feet deep, slipping back and up toward the corner of the page. We considered the alternatives. We rejected the photograph, which lies by telling the truth too fast. We rejected perspective, which is honest about distance but dishonest about importance, shrinking the far wall as if the far wall mattered less. We chose cabinet oblique because it is, of all the ways of drawing, the most like memory. We remember the faces of things faithfully and their depths foreshortened. We remember the front of the house we grew up in down to the chip in the third step, and the back of it as a vague gold haze sloping away. Surjan's tombs are memory-shaped, and so they are drawn the way memory draws. You will notice, beneath every gilding, the same modest pavilion: the glass storey, the slender columns, the truthful box. The gold above it is never twice the same — here it hangs in swags, there it swells into lobes, there it falls in straight bright pleats with a breath of rose showing at the hem — but the box does not change. This is the argument of the plates, made silently, in line and wash: the joy is various and the structure is one. Ten species of gladness, one honest building underneath, the way ten kinds of laughter come out of one human throat. A word on the scale figure who stands at the lower left of every plate. The Bureau's cartographers were instructed to draw an actual visitor, observed on site,

rather than the standard mannequin of the architectural drawing. The figure in Plate I is a woman who came at dawn for forty consecutive mornings and let us sketch her on the last. We have kept the figures small, as is the convention, but we ask you to remember that each is a person who came, on a cold day, toward something bright, and went home changed by a fraction we could not draw but have tried, in the stories, to record. The drawings are in ink and gold on cream. The scale, as marked, is one joy to one storey. It is the only unit the Bureau has ever found adequate. A reader trained in architecture may ask why the tombs are all drawn at a single storey of gold above a single storey of glass, when the buildings themselves vary so greatly in their height and bulk. The answer is doctrinal and the Bureau states it plainly, because Surjan was insistent. Each tomb is drawn as one storey of joy above one storey of honesty because no joy is taller than any other. The catalogue refuses all hierarchy among its gladnesses. The joy of waking unafraid is not a grander thing than the joy of a held door; the dispersal of an author into the weather of an island is not a higher achievement than a widow laughing at a graveside; the witnessed face and the opened hand and the reconciled brother stand, in these drawings, at exactly the same elevation, because they stand at exactly the same elevation in fact. A book that drew some joys taller than others would be doing, in line and proportion, the very ranking the whole project exists to refuse — the ranking by which the serious century decides that grief is profound and delight is shallow, that suffering is deep and gladness is for children. There are no shallow joys. There is only one storey of joy, drawn the same height above one storey of honesty, ten times, and the only variation the Bureau permits itself is the gold, which is various because joy wears many coats, over a box that is constant, because the truth it dresses is one.

Proem Surjan and the Island: The First Conversation

❦

It is said that in their last winter Surjan walked the length of the island many times, and that the Island, which is old and has buried a great many things and is therefore not easily impressed, fell into the habit of talking with them. The Bureau records these conversations as it received them, which is to say imperfectly, and in the voice of an affectionate and very tired landlord.

THE ISLAND. You again. You have walked from my head to my foot four times this week. Your shoes are finished and your heart is not far behind. What are you looking for, that you keep failing to find by walking?

SURJAN. Not looking. Measuring. I want to know how much joy you can hold.

THE ISLAND. I have held everything. I have held the original forest and the people who named it and the people who took it and the fires and the towers and the water rising and the water held back. I have held more grief than you have words for. You want to add joy to that ledger? Be my guest. It is a small island and the rent is theft, but there has always been room for one more impossible thing.

SURJAN. Not one more. Ten. I want to build ten tombs and fill them with gladness and leave them where people will trip over them on the way to work.

THE ISLAND. Tombs. You build me tombs. As if I were short of those. There are tombs under every street you walk; I am paved in them; the whole grid is a polite agreement not to mention what it is laid on.

SURJAN. That is exactly why. You are an island that pretends not to be a graveyard, and so your graves are ashamed, and a graveyard cannot teach anyone to live. I want to build tombs that are not ashamed. Tombs that are gold. Tombs that breathe and broadcast and refuse, structurally refuse, to be sad. I want to make death so honest about the life it kept that people will come to it the way they come to a bakery.

THE ISLAND. And when you yourself go into one of them? You are not as young as your walking pretends. When it is your turn?

SURJAN. Then I will not go in. I will go out. That is the whole point of building them to broadcast. Watch me. I have spent my life refusing the boxes; I am not going to lose my nerve at the last and largest one. When my turn comes I will not be kept. I will be sent.

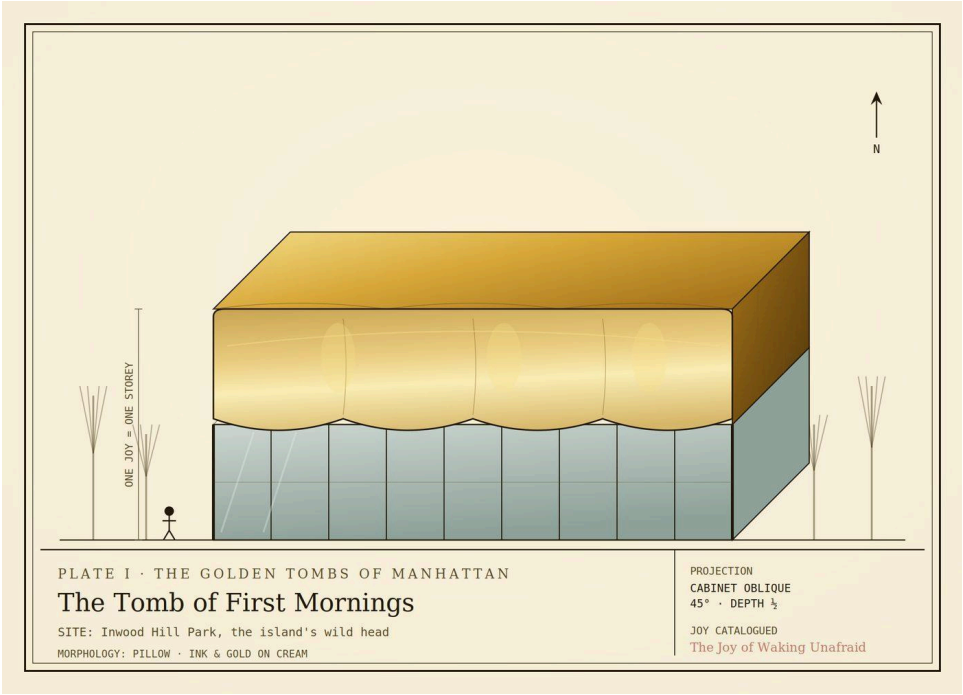
THE ISLAND. Then send. I have held everything else. Let us see if I can hold a person who insists on being weather. Begin at my head, in the only forest I have left, where the morning gets here first.

Suite the First

The Tombs of Beginning

Two tombs stand at the head of the catalogue because they stand at the head of everything: the joy of waking, and the joy of changing. Surjan held that all the other gladnesses are footnotes to these two, and that a city which forgot how to begin again would, whatever else it accomplished, be dead at the root. We catalogue them first, as one teaches the first two letters first, so that the rest of the alphabet has something to stand on.

Plate I · The Tomb of First Mornings


N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE I · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of First Mornings
SITE: Inwood Hill Park, the island's wild head
MORPHOLOGY: PILLOW · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of Waking Unafraid

❦

Plate I. The Tomb of First Mornings, Inwood Hill. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The gold here is the palest in the whole series — nearer the colour of six o'clock light than of metal — and is shown at the instant of its dawn inhalation, the lobes of the hem lifting as the building draws breath.

AT THE WILD HEAD of the island, where the grid gives up and the last uncut forest remembers the glaciers in the grooves of its grey schist, stands the Tomb of First Mornings. It is the northernmost of the ten and the only one that keeps no daytime hours. It broadcasts at dawn and at dawn only, and a person who arrives at noon will find a sleeping gold animal and a great many disappointed pigeons and nothing else at all. The gold of this tomb is the palest the Bureau could weave, a gold so thinned toward white that on an overcast morning you might mistake it for the inside of a shell. This was deliberate. Surjan did not want the colour of treasure here, which is the gold of having; they wanted the colour of the hour itself, the gold of six o'clock in the coldest months, when the light comes up the river before it comes over the land and the bare trees are briefly wired with it. The tomb is dressed in the exact colour of the moment before the day decides what it will be. The architects mixed and remixed the dye for a season and were ready to despair when a woman who had been coming to watch the construction at dawn — we will come to her — looked at the failed batch they had thrown over the railing and said, that one, that is the colour of the morning I stopped being afraid. They used that one. The structure beneath, as in all ten, is the truthful pavilion: glass on slender columns, a box that hides nothing. But here the columns are set wide and the glass is clearest, so that at the instant of broadcast the rising sun comes straight through the building, enters the gold from within as well as without, and the whole tomb is briefly lit like a paper lantern with the morning inside it. Witnesses standing to the west have reported that for the space of one breath they could see, through the lit glass, the bare forest on the far side, as though the building had become a

window the size of a building. This lasts only as long as the sun is on the river. Then the day climbs over the land, the angle breaks, and the tomb returns to being merely the brightest thing for a mile. The dawn pilgrims have developed, without coordination, a set of rituals the Bureau finds touching to record. They climb the hill in the dark, separately, strangers to one another, and arrange themselves in a loose arc on the eastern slope where the first light will reach. They do not speak; there is an etiquette of silence here as strict as in any cathedral, though no one wrote it. They bring thermoses, and share them, wordlessly, a stranger's coffee passed along the arc in the cold. And in the minute before the light comes up the river, when the tomb begins its long inhalation, the whole arc of waiting people, without meaning to, without noticing, begins to breathe in time with the building — chests rising as the gold rises, held at the top of the breath as the tomb holds, released on the exhalation as the story comes out warm across the slope. The Bureau has measured this synchrony with instruments and confirmed it and is, frankly, no closer to explaining why a crowd of strangers should fall into breath with a building than the poets were before the instruments arrived. As for the scent, the chemists have failed, and the Bureau has come to suspect they will go on failing, because the scent is not in the air. Or rather it is in the air the way a memory is in a room: not measurably, not chromatographically, and yet unanimously, every witness reporting clean sheets and coffee, the smell of a morning when someone who loved you was already awake in the kitchen and the day had not yet asked anything of you. Surjan held that this was the correct and only mystery, and that to solve it would be to ruin it. The whole argument of the northernmost tomb is that the best things arrive without cause and resist all accounting — that grace, by definition, is the gift no investigation can trace to a deserving — and a scent that submitted to chemistry would be telling, in the language of the nose, the very lie the building exists at dawn to refuse. The broadcast itself begins the way the building breathes. As the first true light touches the river, the warm air within the gold expands, and the skin lifts — the hem rising, the lobes filling, the whole vast soft mass drawing in a single slow inhalation that takes, by the Bureau's measurement, the length of seventeen ordinary breaths. At the top of that breath the tomb holds for a moment, full, swollen with morning. And then it exhales, and the story comes out on the exhalation in a warm gust that witnesses have described, with a consistency the Bureau finds scientifically irritating and personally moving, as smelling of clean sheets and coffee. Here is the story it tells.

❦

FOR FORTY YEARS a woman named Aurelia woke each morning already tired of it. This was not sadness, exactly, and her doctor, who was thorough, could find nothing to bill for. It was simply that she opened her eyes each day to a faint grey weather of the spirit, a sense of the day as a corridor she had walked too many times, of breakfast as a tax and the commute as a sentence and the evening as the brief parole before it all began again. She was good at her life. She was kind to her colleagues and faithful to her friends and gentle with the strangers who served her coffee. No one who knew her would have called her unhappy. She herself, asked, would have said she was fine, and meant it, and the word would have been accurate, and that was the whole trouble. She was fine the way a long grey corridor is fine. It is functional. It gets you there. No one writes songs about it. She had theories about the cause, as we all do. She thought perhaps it was the work, and changed the work, and woke grey in a new office. She thought perhaps it was the city, and spent a year by the sea, and woke grey to the sound of gulls, which she discovered she disliked. She thought perhaps it was love, or its absence,

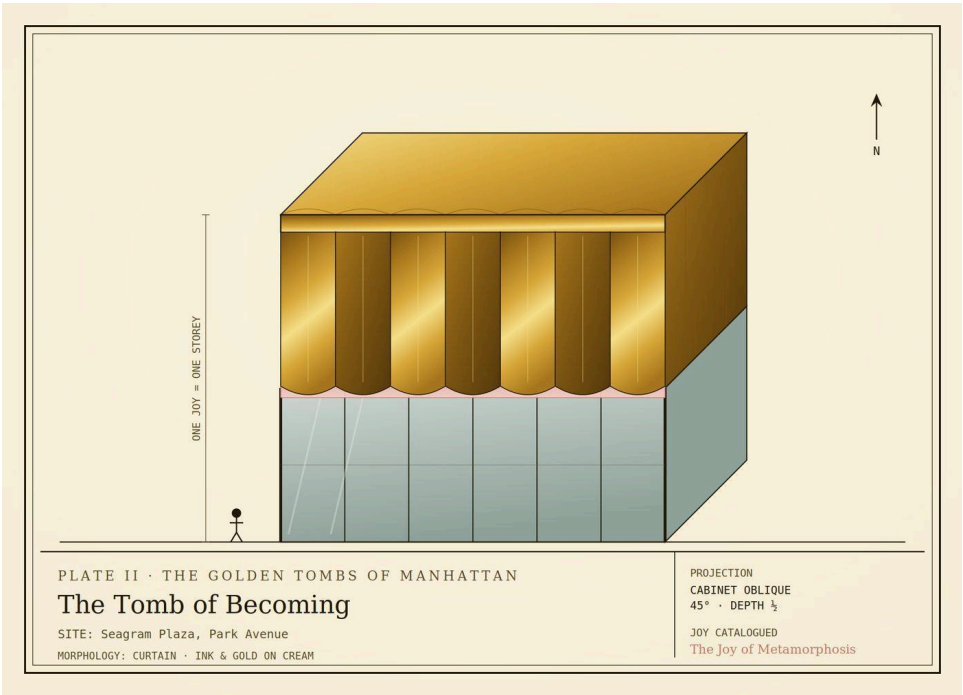
and pursued both with method, and woke grey beside a sleeping someone and grey in an empty bed and could not honestly say which grey was worse. She read the books that promised to fix it. She was grateful and unchanged. She came at last to believe, without bitterness, that some people are simply built facing away from the morning, the way some houses are built facing north, and that there was nothing to be done but keep the lamps on and be kind. And then, on an ordinary Tuesday in her sixty-first year, with nothing whatsoever to recommend it — no birthday, no news, no resolution, the same grey corridor of a life stretching out exactly as before — she woke, and was glad. There is no other word for what happened and no reason to be found for it, and Aurelia, who was honest, refused to invent one. She did not wake glad because something good had happened; nothing had. She did not wake glad because she had finally learned a lesson; she could not name one. She woke, and before she was fully awake, before the grey weather could assemble itself in its usual place, she was visited by a gladness so total and so unearned that she lay still for a long time under it, the way you lie still under a cat that has chosen, for reasons of its own, to sleep on your chest. It was simply, scandalously there. The light on the ceiling was the light on the ceiling. The radiator was making its small domestic complaints. Somewhere a long way off a truck was reversing, beep by patient beep. And she was glad — of the ceiling, of the radiator, of the idiot truck, of the astonishing and apparently sufficient fact of being a warm animal awake in a cold city on a Tuesday with the whole long corridor of the day ahead of her and, for once, no dread of walking it.

Her first thought, being a thorough person, was that she must have done something to deserve it, and that she had better find out what so she could do it again. She spent the rest of that day conducting an investigation into her own happiness. She retraced the previous evening: an unremarkable dinner, a dull program, an early sleep. She examined her diet, her dreams, the position of the moon. She found nothing. She found, in fact, that the harder she searched for the cause of the gladness, the fainter the gladness became, the way a faint star vanishes when you look straight at it and returns when you look a little to the side. By evening she had nearly investigated it away entirely, and she went to bed half-convinced she had imagined the whole thing. She woke the next morning glad again. And this is the part of the story that the Tomb of First Mornings most wishes you to have, the part it saves its warmest gust for. Aurelia spent the remaining years of her life trying to deserve the gladness, and failing, every single day, gloriously. She tried virtue, and was glad on the days she was selfish too. She tried gratitude lists, and was glad on the mornings she forgot them. She tried, in a spirit of scientific desperation, being deliberately miserable the night before, to see if it was misery she was being rewarded for, and woke glad anyway, glad and faintly embarrassed, like a guest who keeps being given presents at a party that is not for them. She never found the price. There was no price. The gladness, it turned out, was not a wage for anything. It was simply the weather of being alive, which had been there the whole time, on the far side of the grey, and which had now — for no reason, by no merit, as a pure and permanent and undeserved gift — turned to face her. Gladness, she wrote, in the only sentence of hers the Bureau has been able to confirm, asks no deserving. That is what makes it gladness and not payment. The morning is not a reward for the night. The morning is just what the planet does, and you are invited, and you were always invited, and the invitation has no conditions and was never, not for one of those forty grey years, withdrawn.

❦

This is the story the northernmost tomb breathes out at dawn, and it is the most attended broadcast of the ten, especially in autumn, when first mornings are coldest and therefore bravest, and the people who most need it can be seen climbing the hill in the dark, in coats, with thermoses, to be in place when the light comes up the river. They are not, for the most part, unhappy people. They are, for the most part, fine people. They are people who have lived a long time in the grey corridor and have heard, by the low gold humming that travels the island all night, that there is a place at the head of the city where a building will tell them, in the smell of clean sheets and coffee, that the morning was never a tax and is not now. The scale figure in Plate I — the small woman standing alone at the lower left, where the cartographers place the visitor — is Aurelia herself, drawn on the last of forty consecutive dawns she spent watching the tomb that her one confirmed sentence had helped to colour. She did not, the Bureau is told, become a person who woke glad every morning for the rest of her life; that is not how the gift works, and she would have distrusted any building that promised it. She became, instead, a person who knew that the gladness was real, and undeserved, and available, and on the grey mornings — for she still had them — she would climb the hill in the dark and stand where the morning gets here first, and wait, and let the building remind her of what she already, on her best days, knew. The forest keeps her sketch. The tomb keeps her sentence. And every dawn, to anyone cold enough to climb up for it, the gift is offered again, on the exhalation, with no conditions, exactly as it always was.

Plate Ii · The Tomb of Becoming


N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE II · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of Becoming
SITE: Seagram Plaza, Park Avenue
MORPHOLOGY: CURTAIN · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of Metamorphosis

❦

Plate II. The Tomb of Becoming, Seagram Plaza. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The drawing shows the tomb in its winter dress of heavy swags; in the plate, as on the plaza, a breath of rose lining is visible at the hem, the one constant in a building that is otherwise never twice the same.

ON THE GRANITE PLAZA of Park Avenue, in the long bronze shadow of the tower that taught the last century how a serious building should stand perfectly still, the Bureau built the one tomb that refuses to. The Tomb of Becoming changes its gold with the seasons, and within the seasons with the weather, and within the weather, some witnesses insist, with the disposition of the person looking at it. In spring it drapes; in high summer it inflates into great smooth lobes; by autumn it gathers into ripples; in deep winter it hangs in heavy swags with a breath of rose showing at the hem. No two photographs of it agree. The Bureau's own plate shows it in its winter dress, and includes a note, unusual for an architectural drawing, advising that the building may not resemble its portrait by the time you arrive. This was the most argued-over of the ten. The engineers protested that a building should know what it is. Surjan replied that this one knew exactly what it was, and that what it was, was becoming, and that a building which broadcast the joy of metamorphosis while itself holding rigidly still would be telling a lie in its own body, which was the one thing they would not permit. So the Bureau devised a skin of many gathered panels and a system of warm air that could be moved from chamber to chamber, swelling here and slackening there, so that the gold could be coaxed, over hours and days, from one form into another and never settle. The tomb is always, at any instant you catch it, in the middle of being something it is not yet. This is uncomfortable to look at for about a minute and then becomes the most reassuring sight in the city. The Bureau has spent some hours watching what the tomb does to the people who pass it twice a day without ever stopping — the suited thousands of Park Avenue, who treat it at first as an obstruction and an eccentricity and a thing to be photographed once, for a friend, and then ignored. But it cannot be wholly ignored, because it is never the same, and the mind, which filters out the constant, cannot filter out the changing, and so the tomb installs itself, against the commuters' will, as the one daily encounter they cannot reduce to routine. A man who has crossed the plaza ten thousand times will find himself, on the ten-thousand-and-first, stopped without deciding to stop, looking up at a gold mass that has become, overnight, something it was not yesterday, and feeling — he could not name it, and would deny it if asked — a small loosening of the conviction that he himself must remain forever what he was made into at twenty-two. The tomb does not lecture him. It simply refuses, beside him, to hold still, and lets the refusal do its slow work on a man who had forgotten that refusal was permitted. And always, in every form the tomb takes, there is the rose at the hem — the one constant in a building defined by change, and the source, the Bureau believes, of the strange comfort the changing produces. For the fear that watching metamorphosis arouses, the vertigo of a thing that will not stay itself, is answered, at the bottom edge, by that steady band of warm colour, declaring that beneath all the transformations something is continuous, something is held, something true runs unbroken through every costume the gold tries on. This is the consolation the tomb offers the frightened young and the frightened old alike: that to change is not to be lost, that the larva and the imago share a single thread of rose, that you may let out every seam of the self and remain, at the lining, against the skin, recognisably and reliably yourself. Change all of it, the rose says, quietly, at the hem. The part that matters does not change by changing. It changes by being, at last, allowed to show. They placed it here, of all the addresses on the island, on purpose. There is no plaza in the world more committed to permanence than this one; the great bronze tower behind it is the very monument to staying the same, beautifully, forever. Surjan loved that tower and wished it a long life and built, at its feet, its necessary companion and gentle contradiction: a building dressed in change, to stand beside the building dressed in stillness, so that a person crossing the plaza would have both arguments available

and could choose, on any given day, which one they needed to hear. The rose at the hem, the single constant, was Surjan's signature. It is the colour, they said, of the lining that is always there, under every costume the self tries on; the warm true colour you find when you turn any of them inside out. This tomb has no single hour of broadcast. It tells its story continuously, in the slow grammar of its own changing, and a person can read as much of it as they have time to stand and watch. But the Bureau has transcribed, from the warmth of a winter dusk, the core of what it tells, and sets it down here. Here is the story the Tomb of Becoming is always in the middle of telling.

❦

THERE WAS ONCE a shy clerk named Daniel who worked in the bronze tower and crossed the plaza twice a day, and who had been handed his name at birth the way you are handed a coat at a party that is not your coat. It fit at the shoulders. It hung wrong everywhere else. For thirty years Daniel wore it and apologised for the fit, taking it in here, letting it out there, becoming expert at the small adjustments by which a person makes an ill-fitting life appear to hang correctly to a casual observer on a plaza. He was good at this. He was so good at it that the casual observers were entirely fooled, and so, on the bad days, was Daniel. But a coat is not a self, however well you tailor it, and the body underneath kept growing in directions the coat had no seams for. Daniel began to feel, crossing the plaza in the mornings, like a letter that had been delivered to the right address but the wrong person, who signed for it out of politeness and lived, ever after, a life that had been intended for someone else. He could not have told you who the intended someone was. He only knew, with the particular certainty of a thing felt long before it can be named, that they existed, that they were patient, and that they were waiting for him somewhere up ahead, at the far end of a change he did not yet have the courage or the vocabulary to begin. The change, when it came, did not come as a thunderclap. This is the heart of what the tomb wants understood, and it changes its whole gold body slowly in order to teach it: becoming is not an event. It is not a single brave morning when you fling off the old coat and stand revealed. Daniel had been promised that morning by a hundred stories and had waited for it for thirty years and it had never arrived, because it does not exist, because that is not how anyone has ever actually become anyone. Becoming is the slow, patient, daily, unglamorous, frequently boring work of letting out one seam at a time, in a body that is always already in the middle of being something it is not yet, until one ordinary day you notice that the coat you are wearing is no longer the coat you were handed, that you have, thread by thread over years, rewoven the entire garment while wearing it, and that it fits — not because you forced it to, but because you finally let it become what your body was always quietly asking it to be. And so Daniel changed, in the only way change happens, which is gradually and then all at once and then gradually again. He changed his name, but not first; the name came late, after years of smaller changes, the way the rose lining is the last thing you see and the first thing that was true. He changed the set of his shoulders and the pitch of his apology and the direction he faced when he woke. He spent, all told, eleven years in the middle of becoming, and was frightened for most of them, and glad underneath the fright the whole time, the way the rose is under the gold. And at the end of those eleven years there was a person crossing the plaza twice a day whom the casual observer would not have recognised, a luminous and entirely particular someone whose name was a sound the old language had not contained and had to stretch a little to hold, and who was, at last, the intended recipient of their own life, signing for it now with their own true hand. Here is the line the tomb saves its slowest, most deliberate change for, the line it

spends a whole winter swag turning into a summer lobe in order to deliver. The clerk named Daniel was not killed by this. That is the lie the frightened tell about becoming, that to become yourself you must murder who you were, and grieve them, and visit the grave. It is not true. Daniel was not murdered. Daniel was the larva, and the luminous someone was the imago, and the one did not kill the other any more than the morning kills the night. The night becomes the morning. Nothing is lost; the dark is in the light, folded in, load-bearing. Every sentence of the old life was true when it was written, and is true still, and leads — every one of them, even the apologetic ones, even the ones written in the wrong name — to the page where the someone finally signs. You do not bury who you were. You wear them, inside out, as the warm lining, against exactly this weather.

❦

This is why the Tomb of Becoming will not hold still for its own portrait, and why the Bureau's plate carries its unusual warning. To draw it once and call that drawing the building would be to do to the tomb the very thing the tomb spent eleven gold years arguing against. So we draw it in the act, mid-change, winter swags caught in the moment before they become something else, the rose just showing — and we tell you plainly that it will have moved on by the time you cross the plaza, and that this is not a flaw in the drawing but the entire and joyful subject of it. Those who come here are, disproportionately, the young and the not-yet, and also the no-longer-young who have finally given themselves permission to begin, which Surjan held to be the bravest pilgrims of all. They stand on the granite, in the bronze shadow of permanence, and they watch a building be unafraid to be in the middle of itself, and they go away able to bear, for a while, the discomfort of their own slow change. The casual observer sees only a person looking at a strange gold building. But the tomb sees what the tomb was built to broadcast: the larva, on the plaza, beginning at last to suspect the wings.

Surjan and the Island: The Second Conversation

❦

THE ISLAND. Two built, and already you are insufferable. I gave you my forested head and my proudest plaza and you have filled them with a woman who would not investigate her own happiness and a clerk who would not stay buried. Do you mean to do this to all of me?

SURJAN. All of you. Head to foot.

THE ISLAND. You know what I notice, weather-person? Your two joys are the same joy wearing different coats. Waking glad for no reason. Becoming yourself for no reward. Both are gifts no one earned and no one can repeal. You are not building ten tombs. You are building one argument ten times, in case the city is slow.

SURJAN. The city is slow. I love it for being slow. A fast city would have learned this in an afternoon and forgotten it by dinner. A slow city needs ten gold reminders the size of buildings, and even then it will forget, and even then I will not mind, because forgetting is only the night the morning is for.

THE ISLAND. You will mind. When you are weather and they walk under you not looking up, you will mind.

SURJAN. Then I will be the kind of weather that is impossible not to look up at. Take me south. Out of the forest, off the plaza, into the crowd. The next joys do not happen to a person alone. They need other people. Take me to where the strangers are.

❦

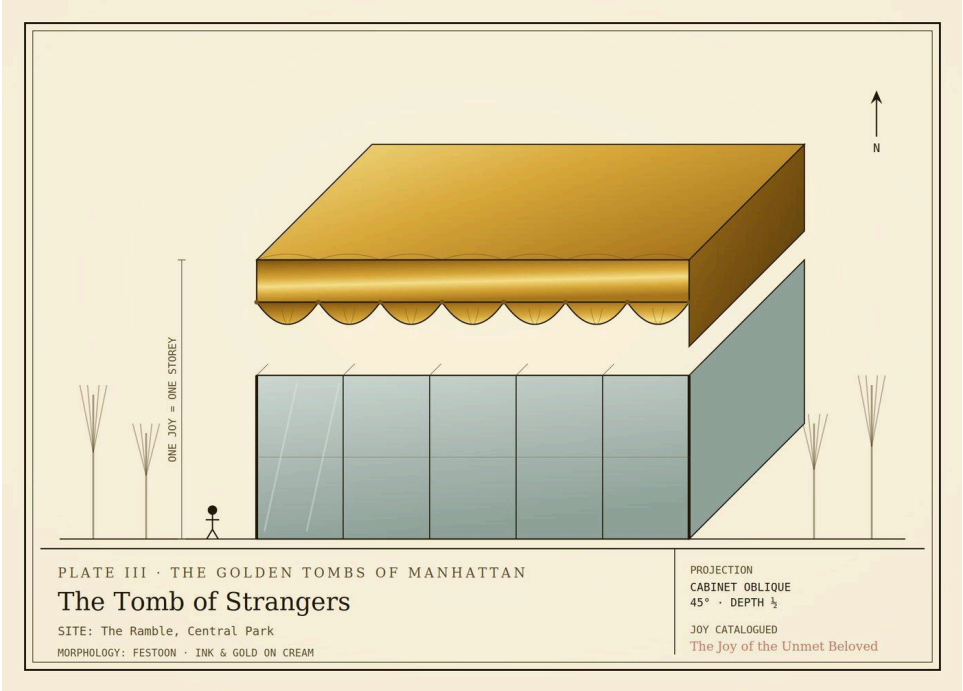
Suite the Second

The Tombs of Encounter

❦

The joys of beginning happen, in the end, to a person alone, in a bed or on a plaza, in the privacy of their own waking and changing. The next three joys cannot happen alone at all. They require another face. Surjan placed these three in the most peopled parts of the island — a wood made for wandering into others, a street made of homecomings, and a great water that doubles every face that bends over it — because the joy of encounter is the one gladness you cannot manufacture in solitude and must, humblingly, receive from someone else.

Plate Iii · The Tomb of Strangers


N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE III · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of Strangers
SITE: The Ramble, Central Park
MORPHOLOGY: FESTOON · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of the Unmet Beloved

❦

Plate III. The Tomb of Strangers, the Ramble. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The hem here is drawn in long festoon swags, like the canopy of the wood it hides in; the Bureau confesses that this is the only plate in the series the cartographers could not verify, since the building is rarely twice seen from the same path.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PARK there is a wood that was built, with great care and at great expense, to be confusing. The Ramble is a deliberate labyrinth, thirty-six acres of made wilderness

laced with paths that double back, fork without warning, and arrive, again and again, at views you are sure you have already left. It was designed in the last century as a place to become pleasantly lost, and it has served, ever since, as the one acre of the grid where a person can stop being a destination and become, for an hour, a wanderer — and where, historically, people who had nowhere else on the island to meet have met, and recognised one another, and been glad. Surjan loved it beyond reason and hid a tomb in it that is, fittingly, the hardest of the ten to find on purpose. It is the only tomb the Bureau cannot fully draw, because it is rarely twice seen from the same path, and the only tomb whose broadcast the Bureau cannot transcribe, because it tells a different story to every listener. This last is not a figure of speech. The Tomb of Strangers does not contain a story. It contains a method. Stand beneath it long enough to slow your breath to the speed of its breathing, and it will broadcast to you the untold life of a stranger — not one of your choosing, but one the tomb chooses, apparently at random, from the unimaginable reservoir of people you have stood near in your life and never known. The gold of it is woven in long festoon swags, like the canopy of the wood, so that even at twenty paces you are not sure where the trees end and the tomb begins, which is precisely the disorientation the building wants, since its entire argument is that the line between the strangers and the beloved is far thinner, and far more crossable, than the frightened city pretends. The Bureau records, for those who care about such things, that the wood was a place of meeting long before the tomb was hidden in it. For more than a century the Ramble has been where the city sent the people who had nowhere else to be met — who could not, in the daylight streets, recognise one another, or be recognised, or stand near the ones they longed to stand near without danger. They came into the made wilderness and found, among its deliberately confusing paths, a margin of the grid where the rules thinned, where a stranger might become, in an hour, the most important person in a life, where whole loves began with nothing but a glance held a half-second too long beside a particular tree. Surjan hid the Tomb of Strangers here precisely because the wood already knew the lesson the tomb teaches, had known it for a hundred years in the bodies of the people the city would not let meet anywhere else, and the tomb is in some sense only a gold acknowledgement, late and inadequate, of a sanctuary the trees had been quietly providing all along. The Bureau adds a second specimen, briefer than the first, because the file seemed thin with only one and the tomb's whole point is the inexhaustible multitude. To a man who came into the wood furious — at his work, at his marriage, at the grey machinery of a life that seemed to be happening to him — the tomb broadcast the untold afternoon of a woman he had once stood behind in a bakery line and resented, silently, for taking too long to choose. She had been choosing, the tomb told him, a cake for her own birthday, which no one had remembered, and she was buying it for herself, with great care, refusing to let the day pass unmarked merely because the people who should have marked it had not — and she was not sad, or not only sad; she was performing, alone, in a bakery, a small fierce act of self-honouring that the furious man had read, from behind, as mere dithering. He had resented a woman for the time it took her to love herself a little on a day no one else would. He left the wood, the Bureau notes, and bought a cake, and brought it home, and his marriage was not saved by a cake, but the afternoon was, and sometimes an afternoon is where saving has to start. The Bureau, professionally obliged to attempt the impossible, did record one transcript, with the permission of the listener, and offers it here not as the story the tomb tells but as a specimen of the kind of story it tells, the way a single pressed leaf can stand for a forest it cannot contain. Here, then, is one stranger's life, as the Tomb of Strangers broadcast it on a grey afternoon to a woman who had come into the wood to be alone.

❦

YOU ONCE STOOD beside a man in an elevator for the length of nine floors, the tomb told her, and you did not look at him, because it was morning and you were tired and looking at strangers is a small expense the tired cannot always afford. You have forgotten him entirely. He has forgotten you. By every measure the city keeps, nothing happened: two bodies shared a rising box for forty seconds and parted. But listen. On that particular morning, in that particular box, the man beside you was carrying the following life. He had learned, the night before, that he was going to be a father. He had not slept. He was riding the elevator up to a job he intended to quit within the year, having decided, somewhere around three in the morning, with the terror and the joy braided so tightly he could not tell them apart, that he wanted to be the kind of father who was home for dinner, and that this would cost him the career he had spent a decade building, and that he did not care, that he had never in his life been so unafraid of caring. He was, in that elevator, beside you, in the most important morning of his life so far. His hands, which you did not look at, were shaking. He was rehearsing, behind a perfectly ordinary face, the sentence he would say that evening to the person he loved: we are going to be all right; I have figured out what matters; it is not this building. And he rode up beside you carrying all of that, the whole luminous trembling weight of a man at the exact hinge of his life, and you stood there tired and did not know, and that is not a failure, that is simply the condition of the city, that everyone you have ever ignored was, at that moment, the protagonist of a life as vast and frightening and joyful as your own. The woman in the wood, the Bureau records, began to weep at this point, not from sadness but from a tenderness so sudden and so large it had nowhere else to go. She wept for a man she would never see again, whose name she had never known, whose child was by now most likely grown, and the tomb let her, breathing slowly over her in its festoon swags, and then it gave her the gift it exists to give, which is not the stranger's story but the thing the story is for. Now ride the elevators differently, it told her. Now you know. You will never again stand in a rising box full of tired strangers and believe that nothing is happening. Every one of them is at a hinge. Every one of them is carrying a life that would break your heart with its courage if you knew it, and you will almost never know it, and that is all right, because you no longer need to know it to feel it. The joy I broadcast is not that you will meet your beloved among the strangers, though you might, in a wood like this one, on an afternoon like this one. The joy is that they are already beloved. Every one of them. Already. By right. Carrying whole luminous lives past you on the street, and you among them, beloved and unknowing, a stranger's broadcast even now, the protagonist of a story some other tired soul will fail to read in some other elevator, both of you saved, without ever speaking, by the bare fact of being two of the impossible many.

❦

This is why the Tomb of Strangers is hidden in the one wood on the island built for getting lost, and why it is the tomb the Bureau most often fails to find when it goes looking, and most often stumbles on when it has given up. You do not come to it. You come upon it. It rewards the wanderer and eludes the tourist, and it sends every visitor back out of the wood and into the crowd with the same altered eyes: the eyes of someone who has been told, by a gold building in the trees, that the city is not a machine for processing strangers but a reservoir of unmet beloveds, thirty-six acres deep and eight million wide, any one of whom, on any morning, in any rising box, might turn out to have been,

the whole time, at the hinge of the most important day of their life, and beautiful, and frightened, and yours.

Plate Iv · The Tomb of Reunion

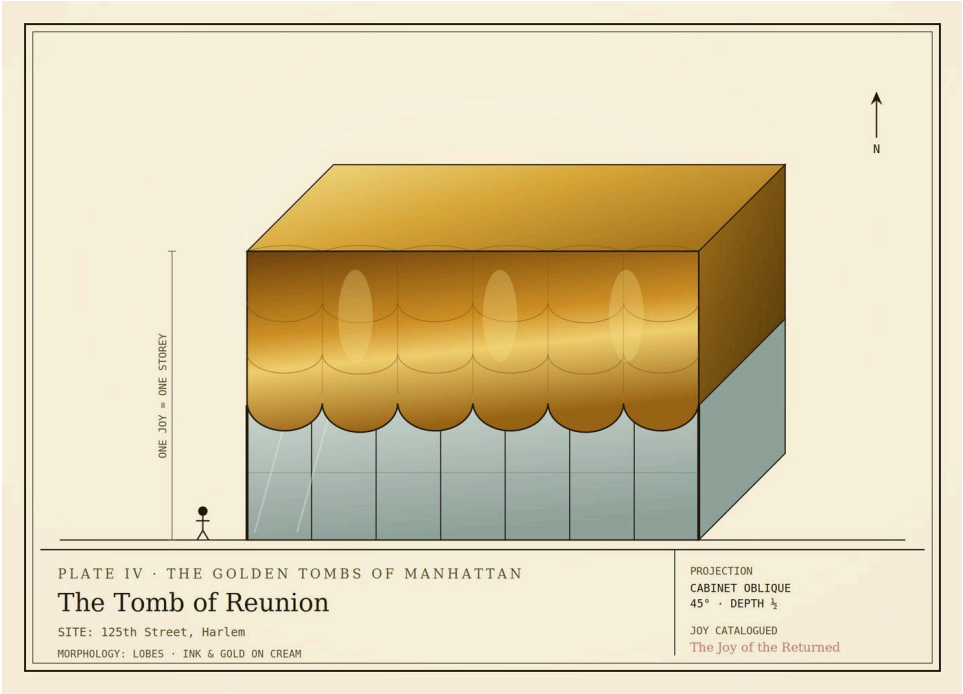

N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE IV · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of Reunion
SITE: 125th Street, Harlem
MORPHOLOGY: LOBES · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of the Returned

Plate IV. The Tomb of Reunion, 125th Street. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The gold is shown in full warm lobes, the heaviest and most generous in the series; the tomb broadcasts at the hour the evening trains come in, and the cartographers drew it at that hour, swollen with its loudest light.

THERE IS A STREET that runs across the shoulders of the island like a clavicle, and it has been, for longer than anyone alive can remember, a street of returns. Trains come up under it and out of it; people who left, or were taken, or wandered, or were sent, have been coming back to it and along it for a century, off the trains and the buses and the long roads north and south, into the arms of people who waited. Surjan called it the artery of homecomings and built upon it the warmest tomb of the ten, dressed in full gold lobes, heavy and generous, the colour of a lamp left on in a window. It broadcasts at the hour the evening trains come in, when the street fills with people scanning the crowd for a particular face, and it tells, over and over, in that hour of arrivals, the story of a single reunion, which is the story of all of them. The story it tells is not a reunion across death. Surjan was firm about this. There are tombs, in other cities, that promise you the return of the dead, and they are cruel, however gold, because they promise what cannot be given and leave the griever poorer for the hope.

This tomb promises only what the living can actually have, which is rarer and harder and entirely possible: the return of someone you lost while you were both still alive. The estranged. The unspoken-to. The one whose number you still have and have not dialled in twenty years. The tomb broadcasts the joy of reconciliation, which it holds to be the most under-attempted joy in the city,

because it is the only one that requires you to risk being the one who reaches first. The street was an artery of homecomings long before the Bureau dressed a building in lamp-coloured gold and set it there. Up the great roads and rails from the south came, across a century, the people of the largest migration the country has known, stepping off the trains into a neighbourhood that became, by their arriving, a capital — of music, of letters, of a particular and hard-won joy that had been carried north in suitcases and song. The street learned, in those decades, the precise choreography of the reunion: the scanning of the platform, the half-second of doubt before recognition, the dropped bag, the collision of two bodies that had been apart too long. It learned, too, the other homecomings — the ones that did not come, the letters that said next year and meant never, the chairs kept empty at tables for people who could not, in the end, make the journey back. Surjan placed the tomb here knowing the street was already fluent in both, and built it to broadcast the homecoming that is always still possible, to a street that had buried too many of the kind that no longer was. As to why reconciliation is the most under-attempted joy in the city, the tomb is unsparing, because it loves you too much to flatter you. It is under-attempted because pride disguises itself as principle, and a grudge held long enough acquires the appearance of a moral position, so that the work of reconciling comes to feel like a betrayal of some important truth rather than what it actually is, which is the setting down of a weight that was only ever hurting the one who carried it. The arithmetic is merciless and simple. The estranged person spends years insisting they are owed the first move, and the other person spends the same years insisting precisely the same thing, and both are, by their own lights, entirely correct, and the correctness is the prison, because two people each waiting to be reached will wait, in perfect symmetrical justice, forever. The tomb's whole gift is to break the symmetry — to whisper to one of them, at the hour the trains come in, that being the one who reaches first is not a defeat in the long quarrel but an escape from it, and the only victory available to either, and that the door has been, the whole time, on their side.

❦

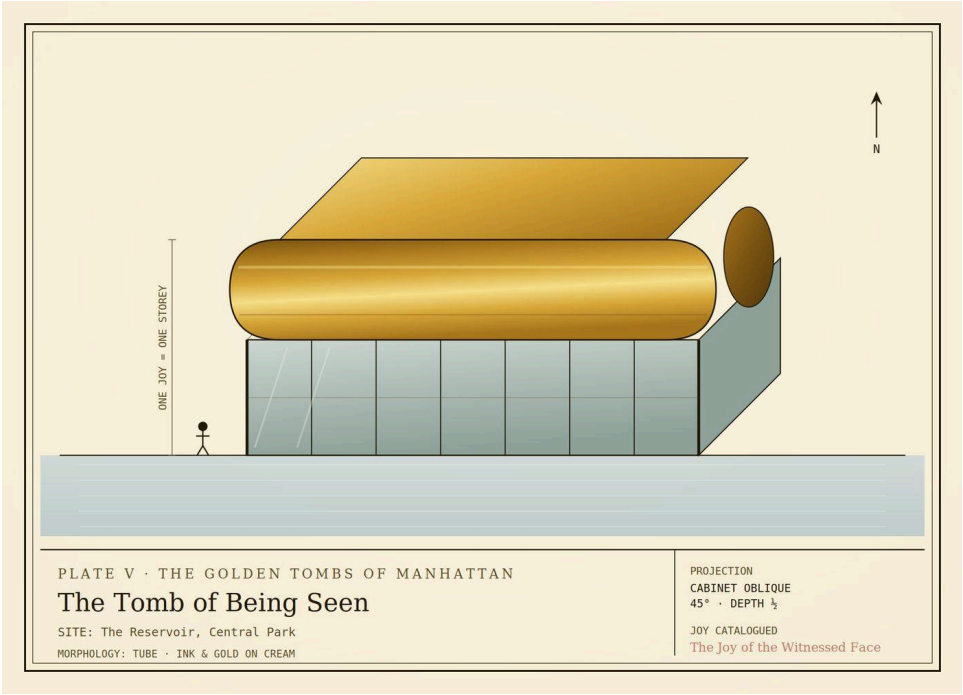
A WOMAN NAMED JUNIE had a brother once, and then for twenty years did not. They had not died to each other; that would have been simpler, and grief, for all its weight, at least knows what to do with itself. They had done something worse and more ordinary. They had quarrelled, over money that no longer existed and a remark that neither could now quote accurately, and the quarrel had hardened, the way water left out hardens, not by any single dramatic freezing but by the simple passage of cold time, until what had been a fight became a silence and the silence became a fact and the fact became, somehow, an identity: Junie was a person who did not speak to her brother, and he was a person who did not speak to her, and each had built a whole life on the far side of that not-speaking, and to cross it now would mean admitting that twenty years had been, in some terrible accountancy, wasted, and no one wants to file that return. She had reasons not to call, and they were good reasons, and she rehearsed them often, the way you worry a sore tooth. He had been wrong. He had been the one who said the thing. He had not called either, in all those years, which proved he did not want to, which meant a call from her would be an imposition, a humiliation, a gift he had made clear he did not wish to receive. Every reason was sound. Together they made a wall she had spent two decades maintaining, repointing the mortar whenever a holiday or a song or a particular slant of light threatened to bring it down. She was very tired of the wall. She did not know how tired until the evening she found herself, for no reason she had planned, standing on the artery of homecomings at

the hour the trains come in, under a great gold building she had passed a thousand times and never once gone toward. The tomb was telling its story, and the story, that evening, was hers, although she did not yet know that the tomb's one trick is to make its single story sound, to each listener, like an account of their own life read aloud by a stranger. It told her about the wall, and the good reasons, and the wasted years, and she stood there in the crowd of arrivals nodding bitterly, thinking, yes, that is exactly how it is, that is exactly why it cannot be undone. And then the tomb delivered the line it had been built, lobe and lamp and a century of homecomings, to deliver. The years are not the cost of reconciling, it told her. The years are the long way home. You have been told that to call him now would mean admitting the twenty years were wasted, and so you have kept the silence to protect the years, as though the silence honoured them. But the silence is what wastes them. The call is what redeems them. Reconcile, and the twenty years are not erased and are not wasted; they become the distance you travelled to get back, the long road north, the reason the arrival will mean what it means. No one weeps at a reunion of people who were never apart. The lostness is not the enemy of the homecoming. The lostness is what makes it a homecoming and not merely a Tuesday. Call your brother, and you will not lose the twenty years. You will finally, at the hour the trains come in, get to keep them. Junie called her brother that night. The Bureau does not record the conversation, because the Bureau was not invited, and there are arrivals too private even for a catalogue of joy. It records only that she called, and that he answered on the fourth ring in a voice she had not heard in twenty years and recognised in less than one, and that the first thing either of them managed to say, after the long road north of all those years, was not the apology each had rehearsed and feared but a single helpless syllable of laughter, the laughter of two people astonished to discover that the wall they had each spent two decades maintaining had been, the whole time, a door, unlocked, with the light on behind it, waiting only for one of them to be tired enough of the cold to try the handle.

❦

At the hour the evening trains come in, the people on that street are scanning the crowd for a particular face, and the tomb above them is the colour of a lamp left on in a window, and it tells them, in its warm and generous lobes, that the face they are looking for need not be a face that left on a train. It can be a face on the far side of a silence they have maintained for years and are now, perhaps, finally tired enough to cross. The tomb does not make the call for you. No tomb can. It only stands there, gold and warm and patient, at the artery of homecomings, broadcasting the one true thing the estranged most need and least believe: that the door was never a wall, that the years were never wasted, and that the handle is, and has always been, on your side.

Plate V · The Tomb of Being Seen


N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE V · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of Being Seen
SITE: The Reservoir, Central Park
MORPHOLOGY: TUBE · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of the Witnessed Face

❦

Plate V. The Tomb of Being Seen, the Reservoir. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The hem is drawn in fine draped points; the tomb stands at the lip of the great water, and on still mornings it is doubled exactly in the surface, so that the plate, the Bureau notes, depicts only the upper half of the actual apparition.

AT THE CENTRE OF THE PARK lies a great still water that the city no longer drinks from but cannot bring itself to drain, because it has become the one wide mirror the island owns — a hundred and six acres of sky laid flat, doubling the clouds, the towers, the runners on its rim, and every face that bends over the railing to look. Surjan built the Tomb of Being Seen at the lip of this water, and built it knowing that on still mornings it would be doubled exactly in the surface, an upper tomb of gold standing on a lower tomb of gold, so that the apparition is always twice the building the Bureau was able to draw. The plate, in honesty, shows only the half above the waterline. This tomb broadcasts in the second person, which unnerves first-time visitors, who are accustomed to stories about other people and not at all prepared to be addressed. It does not tell you about Aurelia or Daniel or a stranger in an elevator. It tells you about you. And it does not show you, as you might fear from a building beside a mirror, your appearance — the tomb has no interest in your appearance, which it considers the least true thing about you. It shows you your face as it is seen by the people who love you, which is a different face entirely, and which most people have never once been permitted to see. The Bureau wishes to dwell, because the tomb does, on the particular cruelty of the ordinary mirror, which most people accept as a neutral instrument and which is in fact the most biased witness a person ever consults. The mirror shows the face at rest, composed, slightly braced — for one cannot look into a mirror without the small involuntary arranging that the act of being observed produces, even when the observer is oneself. It shows the face lit from above, by the harsh overhead light of the bathroom and the harsher overhead light of self-judgement, which carves every

line deeper and pools every shadow darker than any light a loving eye would ever choose. And it shows the face reversed, left for right, subtly wrong in a way the owner cannot name but the camera confirms, so that people are often startled and dismayed by photographs of themselves, not understanding that the photograph is closer to the truth and the mirror is the lifelong lie they had mistaken for it. A person who has consulted only this witness for sixty years has built their entire sense of their own face on the testimony of the one observer in the world who has never once seen them happy, relaxed, listening, or loved. The Bureau records one instance, of a man who had believed himself, on the mirror's evidence, to be cold of face — severe, unwelcoming, a man whose resting expression he had been told, and had come to believe, frightened children and discouraged friends. He came to the Reservoir at the insistence of his daughter and stood at the railing expecting to be shown his severity at last in gold, confirmed and monumental. The tomb showed him, instead, the face his daughter saw across the breakfast table every morning of her childhood: open, attentive, helplessly fond, a face that rearranged itself into softness the instant she entered a room and that he had never witnessed because he was always, when she entered, looking at her and not at himself. He wept at the railing, the Bureau notes, the particular tears of a man learning that he had spent a life apologising for a coldness that existed only in a badly lit reversed image, and that the people who loved him had been seeing, the whole time, the warm true face he had never once been allowed to meet. He had frightened no children. The mirror had frightened him, and he had passed the fear along as fact.

❦

YOU HAVE SPENT your whole life, the tomb tells you, on the wrong side of your own face. This is no one's fault. It is a simple accident of architecture: the eyes are set in the front of the head, and so the one face you can never see directly is your own, and the one mirror you are given shows it to you backwards, flattened, and lit by the cruel overhead light of self-regard, which is the most unflattering light there is. You have studied that backwards, flattened, badly lit face for years. You have catalogued its flaws with a diligence you have never once applied to anyone you love. You believe, on the evidence of the mirror, that you know what your face looks like. You are wrong. You have been looking at a stranger the world has never met. Because the people who love you do not see the mirror-face. They have never seen it. They see the face you wear when you are listening to them, which you have never witnessed, because you cannot listen to someone and watch yourself listen at the same time. They see the face you make when they come into a room, in the quarter-second before you arrange it into something more composed — the unguarded, undefended, lit-from-within face of simple gladness at their arrival, a face you have made ten thousand times and seen exactly never. They see the face you wear when you have forgotten yourself entirely, which is the only time the self is beautiful, because the self is only ugly when it is watching itself in the mirror, frightened, looking for flaws to confirm. The tomb broadcasts that face back to you. It bends the gold and the water and the morning light into the one mirror you were never given, the mirror that shows you not how you look but how you are looked at, and for the space of one still morning it lets you stand at the lip of the great water and be seen, accurately, lovingly, the way you have been seen all along by everyone who ever loved you and could never find the words to tell you that the face you apologise for is the face they fell for. Here is the line the Tomb of Being Seen saves for the moment you begin, as nearly everyone does, to flinch from this — to insist that it is too generous, that it cannot be true, that you

know your own face and it is not lovable, that the loving eyes are simply mistaken or kind. You are not seen in spite of your flaws, the tomb tells you, gold doubled in the water. You are not loved by people who have failed to notice what is wrong with you. They have noticed. They have noticed far more than you think, including the things you believe you have hidden, and they see, in the same glance, the whole of you, the flaws and the gladness and the chipped third step and the lamp left on, and they have arrived, after long and clear-eyed looking, at a conclusion you refuse to credit because the mirror has lied to you your whole life: that you are, exactly as you are, with everything wrong with you fully accounted for, a face worth bending over a railing to see doubled. The joy I broadcast is not that you are flawless. It is that you were never required to be. You were seen, and seen truly, and kept anyway — not anyway, the tomb corrects itself; kept, full stop; the anyway is the last lie of the mirror, and you may now put it down.

❦

People leave this tomb changed in a way the Bureau finds difficult to photograph but easy to recognise. They walk back along the rim of the great water lighter in the face, as though some long-held tension in the muscles of self-regard had finally been permitted to release. Some of them weep, quietly, at the railing, doubled in the surface, and the runners go by and do not understand, and the tomb stands gold above its golden twin and does not need them to. It has done the one thing it was built to do: it has let a person stand at the centre of the island, at the lip of the only wide mirror the city owns, and see, for one still morning, the beloved face they have worn their whole life and never once been allowed to meet — and recognise it, with a shock of joy, as their own. The Bureau wishes to add, against its own professional reticence, that the Tomb of Being Seen has changed the people who tend it more than any of the other nine, and that this is not a coincidence the cartographers can explain but a fact they can attest. To work each morning at the lip of the great water, transcribing the second-person broadcast, is to be told the building's one truth so often that it eventually applies itself to the transcriber: that the face you apologise for is the face they fell for, that you were seen and kept, full stop. There is no inoculation against being told a kindness daily, and the keepers of this tomb have, one by one, over their seasons of service, set down the mirror's lie about their own faces, and gone home softer in the muscles of self-regard, and become, the Bureau suspects, slightly easier to love, having finally permitted themselves to believe they already were. If there is a hazard in the work, it is this one, and the Bureau records it as a warning that is really an invitation: do not take a post at the Reservoir unless you are prepared to be seen accurately, and to survive it, and to discover, to your considerable inconvenience and lasting joy, that the face you have spent a life ashamed of was, the whole time, on the far side of the mirror, beloved.

Surjan and the Island: The Third Conversation

❦

THE ISLAND. Five now. And I notice you have stopped letting people be alone. A stranger in an elevator. A brother on a wire. A face in my old reservoir. You have decided that joy needs an audience.

SURJAN. Not an audience. A witness. They are different. An audience watches you perform a joy you may not feel. A witness sees the joy you did not know you were showing. Every one of these

three is about being seen without performing — by a stranger, by a brother, by the people who love you. The first suite was joy you give yourself. This one is joy you can only be given.

THE ISLAND. And what cannot be given, weather-person? You have done waking, becoming, strangers, return, the witnessed face. What is left that a tomb can hold?

SURJAN. The body. We have been very high-minded for five tombs. Mornings and metamorphoses and the faces of the beloved. But a person is not a mind that regrettably has a body. A person is a body that has learned, against considerable opposition, to think. The next three tombs are for the animal — the honest body, the small kindnesses it survives on, and the laughter that breaks out of it even at the funeral. Take me to the oldest stones you have. Take me up to the cloister.

❦

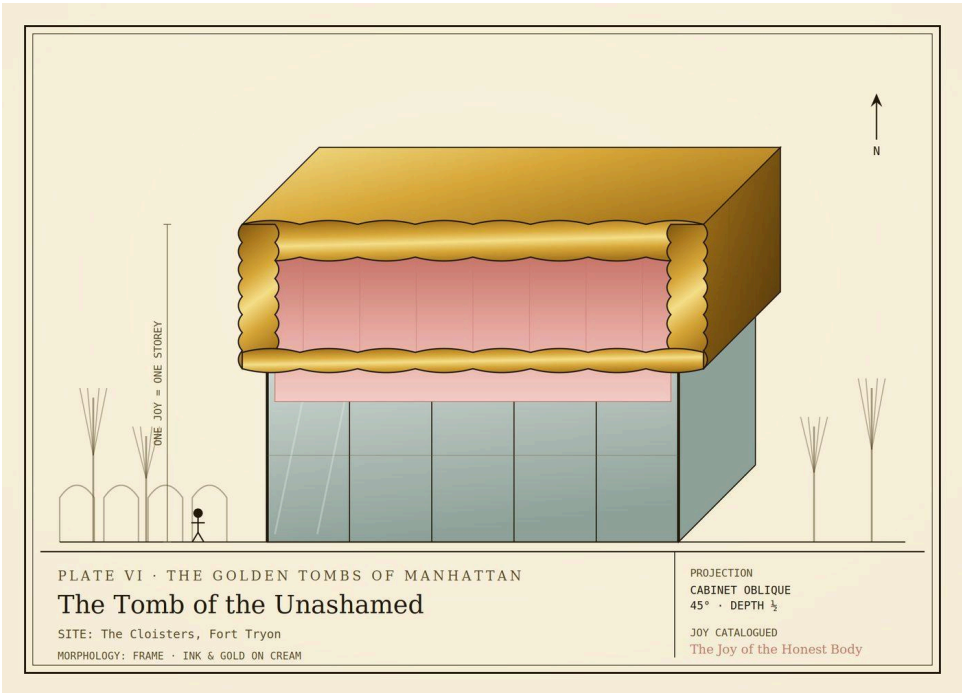
Suite the Third

The Tombs of the Body and Its Mercies

❦

Here the catalogue comes down out of the high air of mornings and metamorphoses and faces, and goes to live, for three tombs, in the animal — in the honest body, in the small mercies that keep it going, and in the laughter that breaks out of it even at the graveside. Surjan distrusted any joy that pretended to have left the body behind. The body, they said, is the only address joy has ever been delivered to, and a philosophy that is ashamed of the body is a philosophy that has refused the package at the door.

Plate VI · The Tomb of the Unashamed


N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE VI · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of the Unashamed
SITE: The Cloisters, Fort Tryon
MORPHOLOGY: FRAME · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of the Honest Body

❦

Plate VI. The Tomb of the Unashamed, the Cloisters. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. Festoon hem with a deep rose lining shown openly at the bottom edge; of all the tombs this one most insists on its colour of flesh, and the cartographers were instructed not to soften it.

ON THE HIGH NORTHERN BLUFF above the Hudson, among the oldest stones the island owns — a monastery quarried in another country, in another century, and rebuilt here arch by numbered arch around four transplanted cloisters and their herb gardens — Surjan set the tomb that argues most fiercely against the building it stands beside. For the monks who first cut those stones spent their lives trying to carve the body away, to starve it and scourge it and reduce it until only the soul remained, pure and bodiless and fit for heaven. The Tomb of the Unashamed stands among their stones and broadcasts, in gold with a deep rose lining shown openly at the hem, the precise reverse: that the body is not the obstacle to the holy thing but is itself the holy thing, the one cloister you never leave, the monastery you were born already inside of and will inhabit, faithfully tended or not, until the day it lets you go. The rose of this tomb is the deepest in the series, and it is not hidden. In the others the lining is a hint, a breath, a constant glimpsed at the hem. Here it is shown openly, a band of flesh-coloured warmth declared at the bottom edge of the gold, because shame is the subject and the cure for shame is not concealment but declaration. The cartographers, the Bureau notes with some pride, were specifically instructed not to soften it. A tomb that argued for the unashamed body while drawing its own body coyly would be, like the Tomb of Becoming holding still, a lie told in the very medium of its message. It broadcasts in the late afternoon, when the light comes low across the river and into the herb gardens, gilding the rosemary and the rue, and it tells the story of a person who spent the first half of a life at war with the body they were issued, and the second half, slowly, learning to live in it as in a beloved and imperfect house. Here is the story the Tomb of the Unashamed tells among the monastery stones.

❦

THERE WAS A PERSON — we will not assign them a name or a gender, because the tomb does not, because the war it describes is fought in every kind of body and the tomb wishes each listener to be able to enlist — there was a person who was taught early, by no single cruelty but by the steady weather of a shaming world, that their body was a problem to be managed. It was too much: too hungry, too soft in some places and too sharp in others, too loud in its wants, too queer in the direction of its longing, too quick to flush and sweat and want and need. The world had a thousand small instruments for teaching this lesson — a mirror, a magazine, a remark, a silence where praise should have been — and the person learned it thoroughly, as bright children learn the cruel things most thoroughly of all, and grew up believing that they were a fine mind unfortunately delivered in a defective parcel, and that the task of a life was to apologise for the parcel and, where possible, to improve it toward a standard it would never reach. So they made war. They fought their appetite and called it discipline. They fought their softness and called it strength. They fought their desire, which was the most frightening front of all, and called the fighting virtue, and lay awake ashamed of wanting what bodies want, as though the wanting were a flaw in them rather than the oldest and most ordinary fact of being a warm animal among other warm animals. They were not unusual in this. Half the city is at this same war and believes itself uniquely defective. The shame is so universal that it passes for the human condition, and a person can live a whole life inside it and die never having spent

a single unguarded hour at home in their own skin, which the tomb holds to be the saddest of all the deaths, sadder than the death that comes at the end, because it is a death suffered while still alive. The Bureau notes that the tomb makes deliberate use of its setting among the herb gardens, where the monks once grew rosemary and rue and sage not for pleasure but for medicine and penance, the body being to them a patient to be dosed and a sinner to be disciplined. The Tomb of the Unashamed broadcasts its late-afternoon story directly across these beds, gilding the very plants the monks grew to subdue appetite, and the irony is exact and intended: that the herbs which were cultivated to manage the body's hungers are now lit gold each evening in service of an argument that the hungers were never the problem. Appetite, the tomb insists into the gilded rosemary, is not the body's rebellion against the soul; it is the body's praise. The mouth that waters is offering thanks. The stomach that wants is keeping faith with the oldest covenant there is, the one that says: you are alive, and being alive is a thing that wants, and the wanting is not a flaw in the design but the entire evidence that the design is working. And on the subject of desire — the front of the war that the person in the story found most frightening, and that the monks among these stones fought hardest — the tomb is at its tenderest and most insistent. The particular direction of a person's longing, whoever they turn toward in the dark, however the world has taught them to be ashamed of it, is broadcast here not as a thing to be tolerated or forgiven but as a form of praise as holy as any the monks ever sang, and holier than most, because it is sung by the whole body and not merely the trained voice. The queer and the ordinary longing, the late and the early, the loud and the secret: all of it, the tomb declares across the medicinal beds, is the holy animal offering up, in the only language it was given, its astonishment at not being alone in the universe. The monks tried to grow a garden that would quiet the body. The tomb has turned their garden into a place where the body is told, at last, in gold, that it never had anything to apologise for, and that the longing it was taught to bury is, of all its faithful functions, the one most like a prayer. What changed them was not a triumph. This is important, and the tomb dwells on it in the low gold afternoon. They did not win the war by finally achieving the standard; no one does; the standard recedes as you approach it, that is its function. What changed them was the body's plain and stubborn faithfulness, noticed at last, late, by accident. For the body, all those years it was being fought, had been keeping every promise it ever made. It had carried them up every stair without being thanked. It had healed its own cuts in the dark while they slept, asking nothing. It had digested its meals and beaten its heart some two and a half billion times and breathed without being reminded and flushed with pleasure when pleasure was allowed and wept when weeping was needed and stood up, every single morning, however unloved, and offered another day of faithful service to a mind that repaid it with contempt. The scars it carried were not defects. They were receipts. Each one was a place where the body had been wounded and had quietly, without complaint, repaired the damage and gone on carrying its ungrateful tenant forward into the years. The person noticed this, finally, in a body grown older — for it is often age, the tomb says, that brokers the peace, when the standard becomes so plainly unreachable that the war becomes absurd and a kind of armistice steals in unbidden. They noticed the faithfulness. They noticed the receipts. They noticed that the parcel they had spent fifty years apologising for had, the whole time, been the only thing that had never once abandoned them, the most loyal companion of their life, asking only to be fed and rested and, occasionally, allowed to want what it wanted without being made to feel that the wanting was a sin. And something in them that had been clenched since childhood, some long-held fist in the soul, opened. Here is the line the Tomb of the Unashamed broadcasts lowest and warmest into the

gilded herb gardens, the line the monks among their bodiless heaven never learned. Your body is not the cloister you must escape to reach the holy thing. Your body is the holy thing, and the cloister, and the monk, and the prayer, all four. It is the only temple you will ever be issued and it is already consecrated, was consecrated at your first breath, requires no further sanctifying and never did. The hunger is holy. The softness is holy. The desire, the queer and particular direction of your longing, is holy — not tolerated, not forgiven, holy, a form of praise the body offers up on its own behalf. The scars are holy, being receipts for faithful service. You were not delivered defective into a defective parcel. You were delivered whole, into a faithful one, and the only defect in the whole arrangement was the lie that taught you otherwise, and you may set that lie down now, here, among these old stones that were cut by men who believed the opposite, and you may go back out into the city at home, for the first time, in the beloved and imperfect house you were always, already, holy enough to live in.

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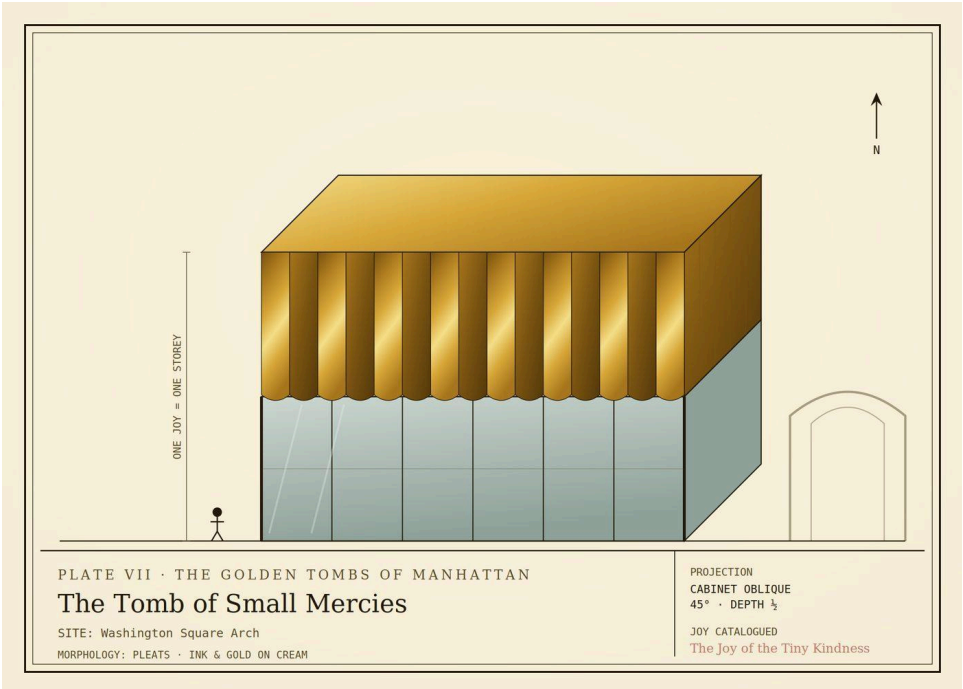
Those who come to this tomb are of every age and every shape and every history of war with themselves, and they come, the Bureau has observed, walking carefully, the way people walk who are not sure they are allowed. They leave walking differently — not proudly, exactly, pride being just the war fought from the other trench, but easily, at home, inhabiting their own steps. The rose shows openly at the hem above them, the colour of flesh declared and not apologised for, and the old monastery stones stand witness, and the river goes by below carrying the low gold light, and a person who arrived at war with the only loyal companion they will ever have goes home, in the late afternoon, having signed, at last, the long-overdue armistice, and made peace with the holy and faithful animal that is, and was always, and will be to the end, themselves.

Plate Vii · The Tomb of Small Mercies


N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE VII · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of Small Mercies
SITE: Washington Square Arch
MORPHOLOGY: PLEATS · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of the Tiny Kindness

❦

Plate VII. The Tomb of Small Mercies, Washington Square. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The most finely pleated of the ten — eleven small ripples to the hem, one for each of the original mercies catalogued by the Bureau — drawn at midday, when the broadcast is busiest and the square most full.

UNDER THE GREAT ARCH, around the fountain that is more often full of children and dogs and the chronically unhurried than of water, in the most democratic square the island owns, where the chess players and the buskers and the students and the napping and the newly in love all hold the same ground without a ticket, Surjan placed the Tomb of Small Mercies. It is the most finely pleated of the ten — the Bureau counts eleven small ripples to its hem, and likes to claim, though it cannot prove, that there is one for each of the original mercies the building was tuned to broadcast. It broadcasts at midday, when the square is fullest, and it tells no single story. It tells a list. This is the tomb's particular method, and it unsettles the literary, who expect a narrative and are given instead a litany. But Surjan held that some joys are too small and too many to be told one at a time, and that the only honest form for the joy of small mercies is the form of the small mercies themselves: a long, patient, unhierarchical enumeration, each item brief, none more important than the rest, the whole accumulating into something that could not be said any other way. The tomb broadcasts, at midday, over the most crowded ground in the city, the following catalogue, which the Bureau has set down as faithfully as a list can be set down, knowing that a list, unlike a story, is never finished.

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It broadcasts the mercy of the stranger who held the closing train doors with one arm and a grimace so that the running woman could make it, and who never learned, and will never learn, that she was running to a hospital, and that the held doors meant she was there in time. The mercy of the man at the coffee cart who has memorised four hundred orders and says good morning by name to people who have told him their troubles at seven a.m. for years and who go to work, on the bad days, slightly less alone for having been called by name once before the day could begin to wear them down. The mercy of the person who, finding a wallet on the seat, ran three blocks in the wrong direction to return it, and refused the reward, and was late for their own appointment, and has forgotten the whole thing, and does not know that the owner of the wallet has not forgotten, and tells the story still, and has himself become, on the strength of it, a returner of wallets. The mercy of the neighbour who took in the packages, and watered the plants without being asked, and said nothing about it, so that the kindness arrived weightless, with no debt attached. The mercy of the person ahead in the long line who, reaching the front and finding you behind them with only a single item and a look of quiet desperation, waved you ahead, and lost nothing they will remember, and gave you back a fragment of an afternoon you would otherwise have spent dissolving. The mercy of the nurse on the night shift who, having no cure to offer and no time to spare, sat for ninety seconds on the edge of a frightened stranger's bed at three in the morning and held a hand, off the record, uncharted, in a hospital that does not bill for the one thing that helped. The mercy of the person who noticed you had gone quiet in the loud group, and did not announce it, but caught your eye across the table and made, with their face alone, the small private sign that means: I see you; you are not as alone as you feel; stay. The mercy of the stranger who told you your tag was sticking up, or your laces were undone, or there was spinach in your teeth — the small embarrassing rescues that one stranger

performs for another out of nothing but the wish to spare a fellow creature a worse moment later, expecting no thanks and receiving, usually, only a flustered one. The mercy of whoever first taught you that you were worth being kind to, so long ago you cannot remember the lesson, only the result: that you, too, became a person who holds doors, a node in the mesh, a small dead patient generous animal building, without knowing it, the reef that holds the bright island up. The mercy of the teacher who saw the child at the back of the room going quietly to pieces and did not call attention to it, but found a reason, the next day and the day after, to stand near that desk and to say, lightly, in passing, a single sentence that the child has carried for forty years and will carry to the grave and has never been able to repay, because the teacher never knew. The mercy of the driver who waited the extra three seconds for the old man crossing slowly, and did not lean on the horn, and gave him with those three seconds a thing more valuable than the time: the sense, for one more crossing, that the city was willing to wait for him, that he had not yet become an obstacle, that he was still, at his pace, a person the lights would hold for. The mercy of whoever it was that smiled at you — you, reading this, on some particular grey day you can no longer place — and meant nothing by it, and changed the whole afternoon, and walked on, never knowing, into a life you will never see, leaving you a little warmer in a way you could not have explained to anyone and did not try. The mercy of the friend who texted, for no reason, on the very day, having no way of knowing it was the very day, the single line that kept the door of the evening from closing all the way. The mercy of the busker who plays under the arch at midday not for the coins, which barely cover the strings, but because somewhere in the unhurried crowd there is always one person carrying something too heavy to carry, and music is a way of helping to carry it that asks no permission and keeps no record. The mercy of the people, uncounted and uncountable, who have at some point chosen, in a small unwitnessed moment, to be slightly kinder than the situation required, when no one was watching and nothing was owed and there was nothing in it for them at all — and who have, by the sheer accumulated weight of all those unwitnessed choices, held the entire city up, the way a coral reef is built of small dead patient generous animals into a structure visible from the sky. And the eleventh mercy, which the tomb saves for last and broadcasts most quietly, is this: that you, too, have done these things. You have held a door and forgotten it. You have said a sentence someone is still carrying. You have been, without ever being thanked and without ever knowing, an item on the list of small mercies that some other tired soul broadcasts to themselves on their own grey days to remember that the city is not only cruel. You are not merely a recipient of the mesh of kindness. You are load-bearing in it. The reef is built of you.

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THERE WAS, THE TOMB ADDS, once a man who came to the square in the certain belief that the world was a machine for grinding people down, and that kindness was a story the weak told to comfort themselves, and that he was a clear-eyed realist for believing it. He had a great deal of evidence. The clear-eyed always do; cruelty is loud and advertises itself, while mercy is quiet and keeps no record, and a man who tallies only what advertises itself will arrive, honestly and inevitably, at despair. He sat by the fountain at midday meaning only to rest, and the tomb began its list, and at first he scoffed, because each item was so small, so easily outweighed by the loud cruelties he could name. But the list went on. The list does not stop. And somewhere around the four hundredth small mercy, the man understood the trick the tomb was playing on his arithmetic: that he had been weighing one loud cruelty against one quiet kindness and calling it a fair scale, when the truth was that for every

cruelty loud enough to be counted there were a thousand mercies too quiet to register, holding the city up from underneath, uncounted, the way the dark patient mass of a reef holds up the bright noisy island that takes all the credit. He had been a realist about a tenth of reality. The tomb gave him the other nine. He left the square that midday a changed accountant, the Bureau records, and became, in his remaining years, a quiet adder to the list rather than a clear-eyed tallier of its absence, which is the only conversion the Tomb of Small Mercies has ever sought to produce. It does not ask you to believe the world is kind. It asks you only to count more honestly — to weigh the loud cruelty against not one kindness but against the true and uncountable sum of them — and to notice, having counted, that you have been undercounting your whole life the very thing that has, the whole time, been holding you up.

Plate Viii · The Tomb of Laughter That Surprises Grief

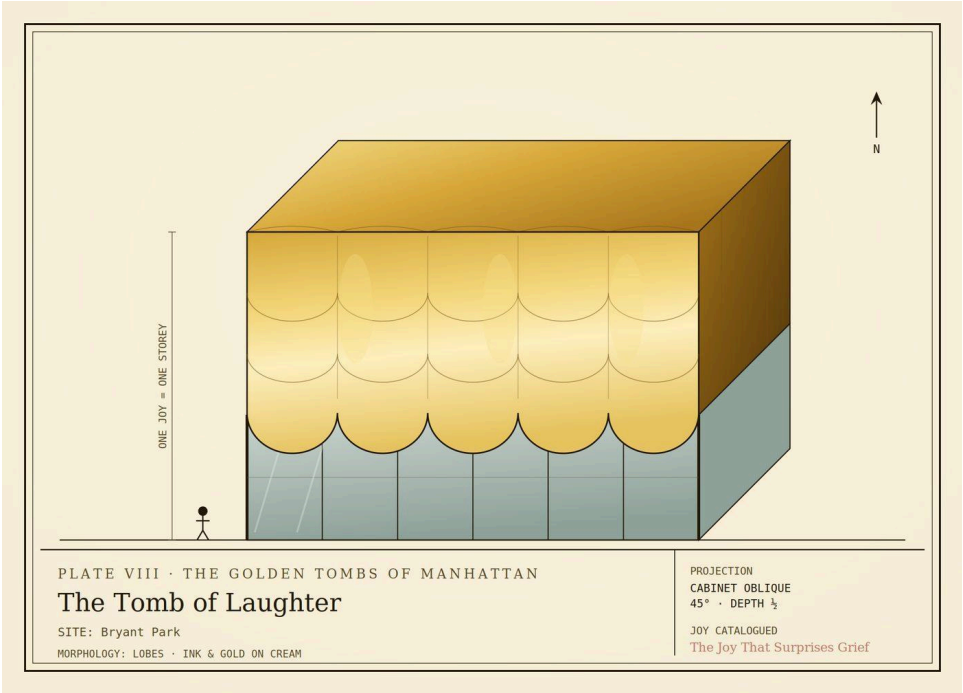

Plate VIII. The Tomb of Laughter, Bryant Park. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The fullest and roundest lobes of the series, drawn at the moment of their loudest inflation; the building, the cartographers reported, appears to be on the verge of laughing, and they let the drawing keep that look.

BEHIND THE GREAT LIBRARY, on the lawn that fills at lunchtime with the whole working city eating sandwiches in the open air, beside the small painted carousel that turns for children and, late at night, for adults who have remembered they were children, Surjan built the roundest tomb of the ten. The Tomb of Laughter swells into the fullest lobes in the series, and the cartographers, drawing it at the moment of its loudest inflation, reported that the building appeared to be on the verge of laughing, and were given permission to let the drawing keep that look. It is the only architectural plate in the Bureau's collection that is, unmistakably, about to lose its composure. The joy it broadcasts is the most paradoxical of the ten, and the one Surjan was proudest of having found

a building for, because most people do not know it is a joy at all and many are ashamed of it when it comes. It is the laughter that surprises grief. The helpless, holy, scandalous laughter that breaks out, unbidden and unstoppable, in the very middle of mourning — at the wake, in the hospital corridor, at the graveside itself — and that the laugher always, always apologises for, believing it a betrayal of the grief, when it is in fact, the tomb insists, the grief's own twin, born of the same love, arriving to keep the griever alive through the part that would otherwise be unsurvivable. It broadcasts in the early evening, when the lawn empties of the working day and fills with a softer crowd, and it tells a story that is, by the Bureau's measure, the funniest in the whole catalogue and also the saddest, the two being, in this tomb above all, impossible to separate. Here is the story the Tomb of Laughter tells, on the lawn behind the library, in the early evening, as its lobes swell toward the edge of breaking.

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AT THE FUNERAL of a man much loved, the family had arranged everything with the dignity the occasion demanded. There were the right flowers and the right music and the right sombre faces, and the widow sat in the front row holding herself together by an act of will that everyone present could feel, like a held breath that had lasted three days. The man had been enormous in life — loud, warm, ridiculous, the kind of man who filled a room and broke things in it — and the careful dignity of the service fit him about as well as a borrowed suit fits a bear, but grief had insisted on the dignity, and the family had complied, and the whole company sat stiff and aching under the weight of a solemnity the dead man would have heckled. And then, during the most sacred silence of the service, at the exact moment of maximum solemnity, the recorded music — which the funeral home had cued with great care — malfunctioned, and instead of the intended hymn there blared out, at full volume, into the hushed and weeping room, the opening bars of a particular disco song of monumental and undignified silliness, a song the dead man had loved without irony and had danced to, badly, at every wedding for forty years, clearing the floor not because he was good but because his joy was so total and so graceless that it could not be looked away from. There was a frozen instant of horror. The funeral director lunged for the controls. And the widow — the widow who had not breathed properly in three days, who had held herself together by pure will through every arrangement — the widow put her face in her hands, and her shoulders began to shake, and everyone thought she had finally broken, and reached toward her, and she lowered her hands to reveal that she was laughing. Helplessly. Hopelessly. Tears streaming, gasping for air, pointing weakly at the speaker, laughing the way you laugh perhaps three times in a life, from a place so deep it has no bottom — because it was him, it was exactly and entirely him, that this and only this song should be the one to crash a funeral he had no doubt arranged the malfunction from wherever he now was, purely to clear the floor one last time, to break the borrowed dignity over his knee, to insist, even dead, especially dead, that they remember not the loss of him but the ridiculous graceless total joy of him, the man who could not be solemn to save his life and would not be solemned over in his death. And the laughter spread, the way it does, the way it must, until the whole room that had been suffocating under three days of dignity was suddenly, scandalously, gloriously laughing and weeping at once, the two so braided that no one could have said where the one ended and the other began, the widow loudest of all, and someone, finally, turned the music up instead of off, and the funeral became, for four undignified minutes, the thing the man had always made of every room he entered: a dance floor, cleared by joy, in his honour. The Bureau has collected, over the years, a great many such accounts, for the laughter that surprises

grief is far commoner than its sufferers believe, each of them imagining their own graveside fit of giggling to be a unique disgrace. There is the brother who lost the thread of the eulogy entirely because a phone in the third row played, of all things, a comedy ringtone, and who stood at the lectern shaking until he had to confess to the room that the deceased would have found this the single funniest thing to occur at any funeral in the history of the world, at which the room agreed, audibly, and was healed by a fraction. There is the daughter who, carrying the urn, was struck by the sudden absurd thought of her father's lifelong complaints about being kept waiting, and laughed aloud at the idea of him impatient even now, even as ash, even in her hands, tapping his foot to get on with eternity. The accounts differ in every particular and agree in the one thing that matters: that the laughter came uninvited, from the deepest place, and that it did not insult the dead but, somehow, restored them — turned them for a moment from a loss being mourned back into a person being known. This is the deeper turn the tomb saves for those who linger past the first relief, the ones still half-convinced that their laughter was a lapse. Solemnity, the tomb says, swelling toward the edge of its composure, is what we offer the dead when we have begun, already, to forget them — when they have become an occasion, a role, a deceased, a thing the proper faces are arranged around. But laughter is what we offer them while we still have them whole, while the particular ridiculous graceless texture of exactly this person and no other is still vivid enough to ambush us. The mourner who laughs has not stopped grieving; the mourner who laughs is grieving more accurately than the one who only weeps, because they are grieving the actual person, with their actual absurdities, and not the marble abstraction the funeral is trying to make of them. To laugh at the graveside is to insist that the dead were funny, were specific, were alive, and that you will not let the borrowed dignity of death file down the edges of who they really were. It is the last and most loyal act of attention, and it is grief at its most clear-eyed, and the tomb will not let you apologise for it. Here is the line the Tomb of Laughter broadcasts at the height of its loudest inflation, the line it exists to give to everyone who has ever apologised for laughing at a graveside. The laughter was not a betrayal of the grief. The laughter was the grief, turned for one merciful moment to its other face. You do not laugh that hard, from that deep, at a funeral, unless you loved that much; the laugh and the loss are drawn from the same well, and the well is love, and a love great enough to break your heart is a love great enough to break you up laughing, and the one is the proof of the other. The dignity was the borrowed suit. The laughter was the man. Grief that cannot laugh has not finished loving; it has only finished breathing. And the surprising, scandalous, holy laughter that ambushes you in the worst hour is not the enemy of your mourning. It is your mourning's twin, sent in at the unsurvivable moment to do the one thing solemnity cannot, which is to keep you alive, and laughing, and therefore still, somewhere under the tears, in love.

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This is why the roundest tomb stands behind the library, beside the carousel, on the lawn where the whole city comes to eat in the open and, in the early evening, to be a little less careful than the day required. People come to it carrying grief they have been holding with great dignity for a long time, and the tomb, swelling toward the edge of its own composure, gives them permission — permission to remember the ridiculous graceless joy of whoever they have lost, permission to let the held breath go, permission to laugh until they weep and weep until they laugh and stop pretending the two were ever separate. They leave lighter, and a little embarrassed, and entirely unashamed, which is the exact

condition the dead man achieved on every dance floor of his life. The carousel turns. The lobes swell. The building is always, eternally, about to lose its composure, and inviting you, in the early evening, to lose yours, in honour of everyone you have loved enough to laugh about at the worst possible moment, which is the best possible proof that you loved them at all.

Surjan and the Island: The Fourth Conversation

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THE ISLAND. Eight. You have given my old monastery a body, my most crowded square a list, and my library lawn a fit of laughter at a funeral. I will admit something, weather-person, and you will not let it go to your head: people walk over me differently since you began. Lighter. They look up. I had forgotten what the tops of their heads looked like turned to the sky instead of the pavement.

SURJAN. That is the whole engineering. Everything else is gold and warm air.

THE ISLAND. Two left. And I think I know what they are. You have done beginning, encounter, the body. There is only one country you have not built in. The one I am most made of. The one under all my streets.

SURJAN. Release. Yes. The last two are about letting go — the small daily letting-go of fear, and the last great letting-go of all, which is mine. I have been putting them off. Even I, who refuse the boxes, have been walking the long way round the last two tombs.

THE ISLAND. You are afraid.

SURJAN. Of course I am afraid. I never said radical joy was the absence of fear. I said it was the coat turned gold-side out. I am terrified, and I am going to do it anyway, gold-side out, broadcasting the whole way down. Take me to the railway in the air. Take me to where the city learned to walk on nothing and found it could be done.

❦

Suite the Fourth

The Tombs of Release

❦

The last two tombs are about letting go: the small, daily, unclenching of the hand that fear keeps closed, and the last great letting-go of all, which is the one Surjan walked the long way round and then, gold-side out, walked into. They stand at the western edge and the southern tip, the two places where the island stops being itself and becomes air, or water, or the wide world beyond. It is fitting that the catalogue of joy should end at the edges, because release is the joy that happens precisely where you run out of ground, and discover that running out of ground was never the catastrophe you spent your life bracing for.

N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE IX · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of the Last Fear Released
SITE: The High Line, Chelsea
MORPHOLOGY: PLEATS · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy of the Opened Hand

❦

Plate IX. The Tomb of the Last Fear Released, the High Line. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The hem falls in fine draped points, like a hand opening; the tomb stands on the old elevated railway, thirty feet above the street, and the cartographers drew it from the level of the walkway, so that for once the visitor and the tomb stand on the same impossible ground.

ON THE WEST SIDE OF THE ISLAND there runs, thirty feet above the street, a railway in the air. It was built to carry freight — heavy things, clenched and bound, hauled through the city's chest at second-storey height so they would not have to fight the traffic below. For decades it carried its burdens, and then it stopped, and stood empty and rusting and full of self-sown wildflowers, and the city, in a fit of the very joy this catalogue exists to document, declined to tear it down and instead made of it a garden you can walk through in the air, among the grasses and the late flowers, between the buildings, above the hurrying street, on the very rails that once carried the heaviest freight in the city and now carry only strollers and lovers and the slow astonished elderly and the wind. Surjan loved this transformation past all the others, because it was the city itself, with no help from any tomb, performing the exact miracle the tombs were built to teach: taking the thing that had carried the heaviest burdens, and opening it, and filling it with flowers, and learning to walk on it as on nothing at all. On this railway in the air Surjan set the second-to-last tomb, dressed in gold that falls in fine draped points, like the fingers of a hand opening. The cartographers, for the only time in the series, drew it not from the ground but from the level of the walkway, so that in Plate IX the visitor and the tomb stand, for once, on the same impossible ground, thirty feet up, on rails built for freight, among flowers, on nothing. It broadcasts at the blue hour, dusk and dawn both, the two times the light is uncertain and a person walking on air is most aware of the air, and it tells the story of the opened hand.

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THERE WAS A PERSON who lived with their hand closed. Not the body's hand — though that too, often, was clenched in sleep — but the deeper hand, the one the soul grips with. They had learned, early and well, that the world was a place of loss, and that the only defence against loss was to hold on: to hold tight to what they had, to what they loved, to what they feared to lose, to control and certainty and safety and the known. They held tight to relationships, and squeezed the life from them. They held tight to plans, and could not bear it when the world declined to follow them. They held tight to old wounds, because a grudge, gripped hard enough, feels like justice. They held tight, above all, to the ground — to the solid known ground of the life they had, refusing every railway in the air, every flowering risk, every chance that required them to step off the certain and onto the unknown, because the unknown might mean falling, and falling was the one thing the closed hand existed to prevent. And it worked, in the way that fear's strategies always work, which is to say it succeeded perfectly at its stated goal and failed entirely at the goal beneath it. The closed hand did keep them safe. It also kept them empty. For here is the thing about a clenched fist that the person did not understand until late, walking the railway in the air at the blue hour: a closed hand cannot drop anything, this is true, but a closed hand also cannot receive anything, and cannot hold another hand, and cannot feel the wind, and cannot be filled. The fist that will not let go is the same fist that cannot take hold. In defending against loss they had defended, with equal and unintended efficiency, against gift. Nothing could be taken from them. Nothing could be given to them either. They had made of their own soul a sealed and burglar-proof room, and had achieved, at last, the perfect security of having nothing left in it worth stealing. What changed them was the railway in the air. They had refused it for years — a walkway thirty feet up, on old rusting rails, with nothing underneath but the drop; everything the closed hand most feared. But one blue evening, for reasons they could not name, tired perhaps of the burglar-proof room, they climbed the stairs and stepped out onto the line, and gripped the railing with their body's clenched hand, and stood rigid, thirty feet above the certain ground, terrified, among the flowers. And the tomb began to broadcast, in gold falling like fingers opening, the one thing the fearful most need and least believe. You think the fear is protecting you, it told them, in the uncertain light. You think the clench is a fortress. But look at your hand on that railing. The fear has not made you safe; it has made you unable to move, thirty feet up, gripping a rail, while all around you people walk freely on the same impossible ground, among the same flowers, above the same drop, and are not falling, because the walking is not the danger; the walking was never the danger; the danger you have feared your whole life is the falling, and the falling is not happening, has almost never happened, is the one disaster your entire clenched life has been organised around and which has, in fact, scarcely once arrived. You have paid the full price of falling, every day, for decades, in advance, in the currency of the clenched hand — and you have never once actually fallen. You have bought, at ruinous and lifelong cost, insurance against a catastrophe that was mostly never going to come, and the premium was everything: every gift you could not receive, every hand you could not hold, every flowering railway in the air you could not walk because you were too busy gripping the ground. And then the tomb gave them the line it falls in points like an opening hand in order to give. Open your hand, it said. Not because there is nothing to fear — there is; you may fall; the drop is real; release is not the denial of the drop. Open your hand because the opened hand is the only hand that can do the two things that make a life worth the fear: it can let go of what is finished,

and it can receive what is coming. The closed fist can do neither. The opened hand can do both. Yes, an open hand might drop something. An open hand might also, for the first time in your guarded life, be filled — with another hand, with the wind off the river, with the late flowers, with the whole astonishing world you have been holding at arm's length by holding everything else too tight. The last fear to release is the fear of releasing. Open the hand that grips the rail. You will not fall. And even if, someday, in the last and largest letting-go, you do — you will fall, the tomb said, the way I am teaching this whole city to fall, which is not down but outward, gold-side out, broadcasting the whole way, into the air you were always, secretly, able to walk on. The person opened their hand. They let go of the railing, there on the railway in the air, thirty feet above the certain ground, among the flowers, at the blue hour, and they did not fall. They stood on nothing, freely, for the first time, with both hands open — and the wind came, and filled them, and they understood, far too late and exactly in time, that the ground they had spent a life refusing to leave had never been the only ground, that there was ground in the air, ground in risk, ground in the opened hand, and that they had been, all those clenched and burglar-proof years, not safe, merely stationary, which is the one form of falling no one ever recognises as falling, because it happens so slowly and so completely and so much like staying still. The Bureau wishes to make explicit the lesson the railway in the air teaches simply by existing, the lesson Surjan loved past all the others because the city had learned it without being told. Here was a structure built for the heaviest, most clenched, most bound and burdened freight the city produced — a thing whose entire purpose was holding tight to enormous weights and hauling them through the air. And when its working life ended, the city did not tear it down, nor did it return the structure to carrying freight, which would have been the sensible and burden-minded thing. The city opened it. It let the freight rails fill with self-sown wildflowers, with grasses gone to seed, with the unplanned green that arrives wherever human grip relaxes, and then it invited the people up to walk among them, thirty feet above the street, on nothing, for no reason but the joy of it. The most clenched structure in the city became its most open one. The carrier of the heaviest burdens became the place you go to feel light. This is the parable in steel, and the tomb only completes it, in gold, by saying aloud what the railway says in flowers: that the way to redeem a life spent gripping is not to grip something better but to open the hand and let the unplanned green come in. The tomb also teaches, for those who cannot yet imagine the last great release, the small daily ones that are its rehearsal, and the Bureau sets down the catalogue it broadcasts at the blue hour, that you may practise. The release of the last word in the argument, dropped unspoken, because being right was costing more than it was worth. The release of the plan the world declined to follow, set down so that the actual unplanned day may be received. The release of the grudge, opened like a fist, revealing the palm to have been cramped and empty the whole time it was clenched in triumph. The release of the outcome, of the need to know how it ends, of the insistence that the future submit to your design before you will agree to walk into it. The release of the self you were at twenty-two, whom you have been carrying, rigid and unchanged, as the one fixed weight in a changing life. Each of these is a small opening of the hand, a minor walking-on-air, a rehearsal at thirty feet for the day you walk on nothing at all — and the person who has practised the small releases, the tomb promises, will find the last one not a catastrophe but a familiar motion, the opening of a hand that has, by then, learned what hands are for.

❦

Those who come to this tomb are the frightened, which is to say nearly everyone, since fear wears so many respectable suits — caution, realism, responsibility, the sensible refusal of the railway in the air — that most of its sufferers do not know they are afraid, only that their hands are tired from gripping and their souls are oddly empty for all they have held so carefully. They walk out onto the line, thirty feet up, among the flowers, and the tomb falls above them in points like opening fingers, and it teaches them the small daily release that is the rehearsal for the last one: open the hand, drop what is finished, receive what is coming, walk the air. They go back down to the certain ground changed, with their hands a little looser, having learned on a railway built for the heaviest freight that the way to carry a life is not to clench it but to open it, and that the city itself, thirty feet over their heads, has been demonstrating this for years, having taken its greatest burden-carrier and filled it with flowers and learned, in plain public view, to walk on air.

Plate X · The Tomb of the Broadcast

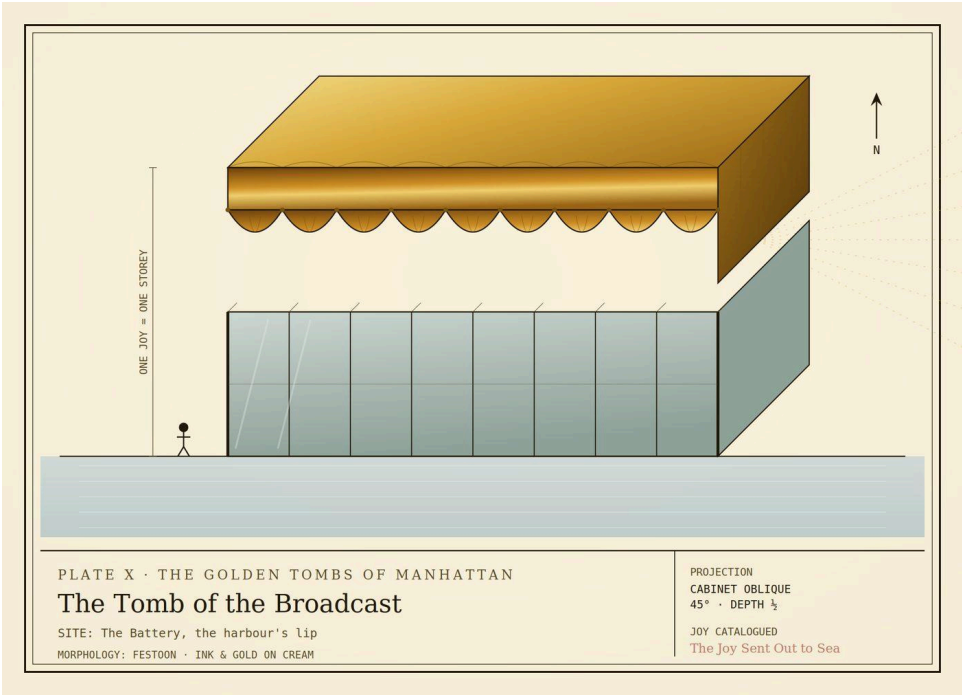
N
ONE JOY = ONE STOREY
PLATE X · THE GOLDEN TOMBS OF MANHATTAN
The Tomb of the Broadcast
SITE: The Battery, the harbour's lip
MORPHOLOGY: FESTOON · INK & GOLD ON CREAM
PROJECTION
CABINET OBLIQUE
45° · DEPTH ½
JOY CATALOGUED
The Joy Sent Out to Sea

Plate X. The Tomb of the Broadcast, the Battery. Cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. The southernmost and last; its gold carries the rose lining of all the others gathered into one, and the cartographers drew it facing the open water, where the island ends and the broadcast goes out, past the lady in the harbour, to the whole arriving and departing world.

AT THE SOUTHERN TIP, where the two rivers give up their separate names and become the harbour, and the harbour gives up its name and becomes the sea, and the sea gives up every name there is and becomes the world — at the very lip of the island, facing the open water and the lady who stands in it holding up her light to everyone arriving and everyone leaving, Surjan built the last tomb. It is the southernmost and the largest, and its gold carries, gathered into one, the rose lining of all the others, so that to stand beneath it is to stand beneath the whole series at once, every species of joy in a single skin. The cartographers drew it facing the water, where the island ends and the

broadcast goes out — not across the rooftops only, like the other nine, but past the lady in the harbour, over the open sea, to the whole arriving and departing world. This is the Tomb of the Broadcast, and it is the one

Surjan went into, which is to say the one Surjan came out of, which is to say the one you are reading from now. It broadcasts at all hours and in all weathers, because it does not tell a story so much as send one. The other nine each keep a single joy. This one keeps the act of keeping itself — the broadcast, the sending, the turning of a private gladness into a public light. And the story it sends, over and over, past the lady and out to sea, is the story of how the catalogue you are holding came to be told at all, which is the story of Surjan's last and largest refusal.

❦

YOU HAVE READ, the tomb sends, the stories of the nine. The woman who woke glad for no reason. The clerk who became the someone the language had to stretch to hold. The stranger in the rising box at the hinge of his life. The brother on the far side of the silence. The face in the great still water, beloved and unbelieving. The body, holy and faithful and at war for fifty years. The list of small mercies that holds the city up from underneath. The widow laughing at the funeral she had no doubt arranged. The hand, opening, on the railway in the air. You have read all nine, and you have perhaps wondered, as readers do, who is telling them, and where the teller has got to, and why a book of such relentless gladness should be built in the shape of a graveyard. Here is the answer, the tomb sends, out past the lady, over the water, to wherever you are. The teller is not gone. The teller is here, and here, and here — at the head of the island where the morning gets here first, on the plaza where the larva suspects its wings, in the wood where the strangers are already beloved, on the street where the years are the long way home, at the water that doubles the beloved face, among the stones where the body is the holy thing, under the arch where the small mercies hold up the world, behind the library where the laughter surprises the grief, on the railway where the hand learns to open. The teller is distributed. The teller chose, at the last, the thing they had chosen at every turn of their life: not the box, but the refusal of the box; not to be kept, but to be sent; not to go into the ground, faithfully tended and quietly mourned, but to go out, gold-side out, across the rooftops and over the water and into the whole world, as weather, as light, as a low gold humming the sleepless can follow home. I told the Island, the tomb sends, in the voice that is Surjan's and is also the wind's, that I would not lose my nerve at the last and largest box, and I want you to know that I very nearly did. Even refusing the boxes is harder at the end, when the box is so final and so reasonable and everyone you love is standing around it weeping and asking you, with their grief, to please just get in, so that they will know where you are. It would have been a kindness to get in. It would have given them an address for their sorrow, a stone to bring flowers to, a place to be sad in on the anniversary. I thought about it. I am not made of courage; I am made of the same fear as everyone, turned, with great effort, gold-side out. But I had spent a whole life arguing that joy belongs in public, on a scale you cannot ignore, available to the tired and the frightened and the not-yet-themselves, and I could not, at the end, make my own death the one private thing, the one box, the one stone in a quiet field where joy is not allowed to be loud. So I did the only thing consistent with everything I had ever said. I asked to be broadcast. I asked to be turned, like all the rest, gold-side out, and sent. And here is what I have learned, the tomb sends, that I could not have learned any other way, and that I send to you now past the lady's light, over the open water, to the whole arriving and departing world. It does not hurt. The

letting-go I feared my whole life, the falling, the dispersal, the loss of the clenched and certain self — it is not the catastrophe the closed hand spends a life bracing for. It is the railway in the air. You do not fall down. You fall outward. You become, at last and all at once, the size you always secretly were, which is the size of everyone you ever loved and every morning you ever woke glad in and every stranger you ever failed to see and every small mercy you ever did without being thanked. I am not less, now, distributed. I am more. I am the whole island's weather. I am the brightest thing on eight million horizons. And the only grief left in me — for there is one, the tomb sends, even gold-side out there is one — is for the people I love, who would have liked an address, and who must make do instead with the whole bright sky, and learn, as I am asking the whole city to learn, to look up for me, and find me there, everywhere it is bright, broadcasting, not gone, never gone, only at last too large to be kept in any single place, including, my loves, including a body, including a name, including a grave. I chose the harbour, the tomb sends, because the harbour is the one place on the island that has always understood arrival and departure to be the same event seen from two sides. Watch the ferries. Watch the freighters low in the water with the goods of the whole earth. Watch, if you are here at the right hour, the great slow ships that still bring people — fewer now, but still, always, some — to the lip of the island for the first time, scanning the skyline the way the people on the street uptown scan the crowd, looking for the future the way the others look for a face. Every one of them is both leaving everything and arriving at everything, in the same breath, on the same deck, and the lady stands in the water holding up her light to all of them without distinguishing the comers from the goers, because to her, as to the harbour, as now to me, there is no difference worth marking. I am leaving the island and arriving at the world in the same dispersal. I am the departing freighter and the arriving immigrant and the lady's lifted light, all three, and the grief and the joy of it are, like everything else at the harbour's lip, the single event seen from two sides. And so I send this last thing, the tomb sends, out past the lady, over the open water, to you who are reading at whatever edge you have reached. Do not mistake the shape of this book for its meaning. It is built like a catalogue of tombs, in cabinet oblique, with a map and a plate list and all the dry apparatus of the museum, because I wanted to smuggle the most undisciplined thing in the world — joy, radical and public and impossible to lose — past the customs of a serious century, and the only way to smuggle joy past the serious is to dress it in the uniform of the serious, to give it footnotes and dimensions and a colophon, and trust that the reader will feel, under the dry gold drape of the catalogue, the warm rose lining of the actual argument, which is not an argument at all but an invitation, and not even an invitation, finally, but a hand, opened, held out across the water, asking you the only question the whole apparatus was ever built to ask, which is: how have you been, and will you, now, at last, look up? So do not bring me flowers, the tomb sends, to the southern tip, over the water, to the world. Bring me your upturned faces. Walk toward the brightest thing on your horizon and let it be me, or let it be you, it no longer matters which, that was always the secret the boxes were built to keep from you: that the teller and the told, the broadcaster and the broadcast, the weather and the ones who walk under it looking up, were never as separate as the grammar pretended. I dissolved into the broadcast. So can you. That is not a threat and it is not only a death; it is an instruction, and it is the last and largest joy, and the afterword that follows these plates will tell you, plainly and in order, how it is done.

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This is the last of the ten, and the largest, at the lip of the island where everything gives up its name and becomes the world. It sends its broadcast out past the lady in the harbour at all hours and in all weathers, to the ferries and the freighters and the immigrants and the tourists and the gulls and the whole arriving and departing earth, and what it sends is not grief, though it was built where a person was lost, and not a story, though it holds them all, but an invitation, gold-side out, over the open water: that joy is meant to be public, and large, and impossible to lose; that the tellers are not gone but distributed, weather now, light now, a humming the sleepless follow home; and that you, reading this at the edge of the island or the edge of the world or the edge of some grief of your own, are not only permitted but expected, when your time comes, to refuse the box, and to ask, as Surjan asked, gold-side out, terrified, and doing it anyway: not to be kept, but to be sent.

Surjan and the Island: The Last Conversation

❦

THE ISLAND. Ten. They are all built, and you are inside them, and outside them, and you are, I notice, harder to talk to now — your voice comes from everywhere, which is a great deal more annoying than when it came from a person with finished shoes.

SURJAN. I am sorry for the shoes. I am sorry for the weeping at the box. I am not sorry for the rest.

THE ISLAND. I have held everything, weather-person. I told you that the first night, when you came walking with your measuring. The forest and the fires and the towers and the water and more grief than you had words for. And I will tell you now the thing I did not tell you then, because you had not earned it and now you have. In all the centuries I have held, you are the first thing I have been asked to hold that insisted on being joy. Grief I am paved in. Joy is the new construction. It is not what islands are for. And it is, I find, to my considerable surprise, the only tenant that has ever made the rent feel like anything other than theft.

SURJAN. Then keep them lit. That is all I ask. When I forget myself, as even weather forgets itself, keep them lit, and keep the lids off, and keep the faces turned up. The catalogue will help. People believe a thing more if it has been properly drawn.

THE ISLAND. I will keep them lit. Go on, then. Be everywhere it is bright. I have a great many tired people walking over me this morning with their faces toward the pavement, and exactly ten reasons, now, for them to look up. Go and be the brightest of them. I will hold the rest.

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Appendix

A Gazetteer of Apocryphal Tombs

❦

Ten tombs were built. Many more were proposed, dreamed, sketched on napkins, demanded by petition, or simply rumoured into a kind of half-existence by people who were sure they had stood beneath them. The Bureau keeps a file of these, the apocryphal tombs, the ones that were never raised, and offers a selection here, partly out of completeness and partly because Surjan held that a

city is built as much from the joys it failed to enshrine as from the ones it managed. Each entry records the joy the tomb would have kept, and, where it is known, the reason the tomb was never built — for the reasons, the Bureau has found, are frequently the most joyful part. The Tomb of the Word in Another Language for Which There Is No English. It would have kept the joy of feelings too precise to be said in one's own tongue — the particular gladness of borrowed words that fit a corner of the heart the mother language left bare. It was never built because the committee could not agree which untranslatable word to inscribe over the door, each member insisting, in their grandmother's language, on a different one, until they realised the argument itself was the monument, and went to lunch, reconciled, in four languages. The Tomb of the Afternoon Nap. It would have broadcast the joy of sleep stolen in daylight, the guiltless twenty minutes that repair a whole afternoon. Construction was abandoned when it was discovered that everyone assigned to build it kept falling asleep on site, in the warm gold shade of the half-raised skin, and waking refreshed, and going home, having proved the building's thesis so thoroughly that the building became redundant. The Tomb of the Smell of Rain on Hot Pavement. It would have kept petrichor, the joy that rises off summer stone at the first drops, older than memory and impossible to summon at will. It was not built because the Bureau could not decide whether to build it for the rain or for the pavement, and because, every time they came near a decision, it rained, and they all went out to stand in it instead, which is, the file notes, the correct response and arguably the tomb already. The Tomb of Being Wrong. It would have broadcast the underrated joy of changing one's mind — the lightness that follows when a long-defended position is at last set down. It could not be built because everyone involved was certain of the design, and the only person who proposed an alternative was, by the building's own logic, the only one fit to build it, and they had by then changed their mind about wanting to. The Tomb of Found Money in an Old Coat. It would have kept the small clean windfall joy of a forgotten twenty in a winter pocket — money you already owned, returned to you by your own past self as a gift across time. It was never built because the funds allocated for it were, with a symmetry the Bureau found unanswerable, discovered to have been left in the pocket of a coat, and spent, gladly, on lunch for strangers. The Tomb of the Dog Who Waited at the Window. It would have broadcast the joy of being awaited — the whole-body gladness of a creature who has spent the entire day believing, against all evidence, that you would come back, and is proven right. It was not raised because no architect could draw a building as glad to see you as a dog is, and Surjan refused to accept a design that fell short of the brief. The Tomb of the First Snow. It would have kept the hush and wonder of the year's first snow, in the brief hour before the city greys it — the joy that makes adults stop on the sidewalk and tilt their faces up like children. It was abandoned because it could only be built in that one hour, and every winter the builders, arriving with their materials, found themselves instead standing still with their faces tilted up, having become the thing they came to make. The Tomb of the Phone Call That Was Not Bad News. It would have broadcast the flood of relief when the ringing phone, braced for catastrophe, turns out to be someone calling only to say they were thinking of you. It was never built; the Bureau kept meaning to begin, but every time they reached for the plans the phone rang, and it was good news, and they forgot the plans in the gladness, which the file records as a complete success. The Tomb of the Empty Subway Car at Rush Hour. It would have kept the furtive, faintly guilty joy of the impossible — a whole empty car arriving at the most crowded hour, yours alone, a small miracle the city is not supposed to permit. It could not be built because no one could explain how the miracle worked, and a tomb to an unexplained mercy felt, to the engineers, like

tempting it, and they let it remain wild. The Tomb of the Reconciled Argument. It would have broadcast the particular sweetness on the far side of a fight with someone you love — the tenderness that is somehow larger after the rupture than before it, the relief of the held hand returned. A site was chosen and a quarrel broke out over it among the planners, who then reconciled so movingly that they declared the reconciliation itself the monument and disbanded, friends. The Tomb of the Song You Forgot You Knew. It would have kept the joy of a melody surfacing whole after thirty years, every word intact, summoned by nothing, proving the mind keeps gladness in deeper vaults than it admits. It was not built because the moment the planners hummed the example song to one another, they all knew it, and sang it, badly, in a stairwell, and went home satisfied that the vault was secure. The Tomb of the Word "Yet". It would have broadcast the small architectural miracle of a single syllable that turns a sentence of despair into a sentence of hope: I cannot do this — yet. It was never raised because the Bureau kept saying they had not built it yet, and found, in saying so, that they had already enshrined the word in the only place it lives, which is the mouth of a person not finished trying. The Tomb of the Stranger's Umbrella. It would have kept the joy of being tilted under a stranger's umbrella at a crossing in the rain, the wordless brief shelter offered and accepted between people who will never meet again. It was not built because every prototype, left out in the weather to be tested, was carried off by someone sheltering a stranger, which the Bureau ruled was the umbrella performing its function and declined to prosecute. The Tomb of the Plant That Did Not Die. It would have broadcast the disproportionate pride of keeping a green thing alive through a hard winter — the joy of stewardship rewarded, of a small life sustained by your unreliable care. It remains unbuilt; the commemorative plant placed at the proposed site thrived so vigorously, untended, that the Bureau concluded the site preferred to make the point itself, and let it grow. The Tomb of the Green Lights All the Way. It would have kept the rare, undeserved, gliding joy of every signal turning green as you reach it, the city briefly conspiring to wave you through. It could not be built because the building of it would have required closing several streets, turning every light red for months, which the planners found too bitter an irony, and so they let the joy stay rare, which is, they admitted, the secret of it. The Tomb of the Forgiven Self. It would have broadcast the hardest-won joy of all — the day you finally extend to your own past self the mercy you have always extended freely to others, and set down a debt you have been paying with interest for years. The Bureau began it many times and abandoned it many times, which they came to understand was not failure but the very subject, self-forgiveness being a thing one is always beginning again, and they left the foundation open, in case you need it. The Tomb of the Unexpected Day Off. It would have kept the schoolchild's pure joy of the cancelled day — snow on the radio, the long ordained hours suddenly handed back, time turned from a sentence into a gift. It was not built because the day chosen for the groundbreaking was itself cancelled, by snow, and the Bureau, given the hours back, spent them sledding, and counted the project complete. The Tomb of the Right Word Arriving Just in Time. It would have broadcast the joy of the word you needed appearing on your tongue at the exact moment the conversation required it — the mind's small grace under pressure. It was never built; the Bureau, attempting to describe the joy for the plaque, kept failing to find the right word, and then, just in time, found it, and the plaque was all they made, and it was enough. The Tomb of the Held Hand in the Dark Theatre. It would have kept the joy of a hand finding yours in the dark when the film turns frightening or sad — sought without looking, given without a word, the whole of companionship in five fingers. It was not built because the dark required for it could not be guaranteed in a public building, and Surjan refused to

enshrine in light a joy that lives by touch in the dark, and let it remain where it belongs, in every theatre, free. The Tomb of the Letter That Crossed the Ocean. It would have broadcast the joy of slow correspondence — a letter written by hand, carried by water, arriving weeks later still smelling faintly of another country and another desk. It remains unbuilt because the design was mailed to the planning office by sea, for authenticity, and has not yet arrived, and the Bureau waits for it happily, having decided the waiting is the point. The Tomb of the Cat Choosing Your Lap. It would have kept the absurd, undeserved honour of being selected, out of all available surfaces, by a creature who owes you nothing and has decided, for reasons of its own, that you will do. It was not built because the cat brought in to consult on the design chose, instead of any of the proposed sites, the lap of the senior planner, who could not then rise to vote, and the meeting was adjourned, and never reconvened, the matter having settled itself. The Tomb of the Pun So Bad It Becomes Good. It would have broadcast the groan that turns helplessly into a laugh — the joy of language misbehaving so thoroughly that delight overrules judgement. It could not be built because every name proposed for it was a pun, and each was rejected as too bad, until one was so bad that the entire committee laughed, and the laughter disqualified their judgement, and they adjourned, defeated and delighted, which is the only correct response to a sufficiently bad pun. The Tomb of the Stranger Who Sang on the Platform. It would have kept the joy of unbidden public music — the voice that rises, unembarrassed, in a tiled underground station, and turns a grim commute, for the length of one song, into a shared and secret concert. It was not built because the busker engaged to model for it drew, by singing, a crowd so glad that the platform itself became the monument, nightly, for free, and a built tomb seemed a poor and silent substitute. The Tomb of the Last Bite, Saved and Then Eaten. It would have broadcast the small disciplined joy of the best bite kept for the end — the delayed and deliberate gratification of a person who trusts the future enough to save the good part for it. It remains unbuilt because the model meal prepared for the dedication was so good that no one saved the last bite, every planner eating greedily and at once, thereby disproving the thesis and proving a better one, which is that joy deferred is sometimes joy declined, and that the future is not always owed the best bite. The Tomb of the Nickname Only One Person Uses. It would have kept the small warm secret of being called, by a single person in all the world, a name that no one else knows and that means, in its whole private etymology, you are mine and I am glad of it. It was never built because the Bureau could not inscribe the name on the door without making it public, and a nickname made public is a nickname killed, and so the joy was left where it lives, in the mouth of the one person, unspoken in stone, which is the only way it survives.

The Tomb of the Thing You Were Dreading That Turned Out Fine. It would have broadcast the flood of disproportionate relief when the appointment, the conversation, the result long dreaded arrives and is simply, anticlimactically, all right — the joy of a catastrophe that politely declines to occur. It remains unbuilt because the planners, dreading the difficulty of the build, found it went perfectly smoothly, thereby experiencing the exact joy in question and concluding that the building, having already happened to them, need not also be made of stone. The Tomb of the Stranger Who Laughed at Your Joke. It would have kept the small social triumph, out of all proportion to its cause, of making a stranger laugh — the brief gold proof that you are not, after all, alone behind your eyes, that something you found funny was found funny by another, that the wall between two minds is, for the length of one laugh, not there. It was not built because every meeting called to design it dissolved into jokes, and the laughter so thoroughly demonstrated the thesis that the building was deemed a

redundancy and the committee, helpless and delighted, adjourned again. The Tomb of the Tomb. It would have kept the joy of the tombs themselves — a monument to monuments, an enshrinement of enshrining, a building whose only broadcast was the gladness of having built the others. Surjan refused it absolutely, on the grounds that a joy which points only at other joys has forgotten to be one, and that the surest way to lose the radical in radical joy is to start commemorating your own commemorations. It is the only apocryphal tomb that was not abandoned but expressly forbidden, and the Bureau records the prohibition here, in a catalogue, with full awareness of the irony, which Surjan, wherever they are now, is certainly enjoying.

Catalogue of Architectural Plates

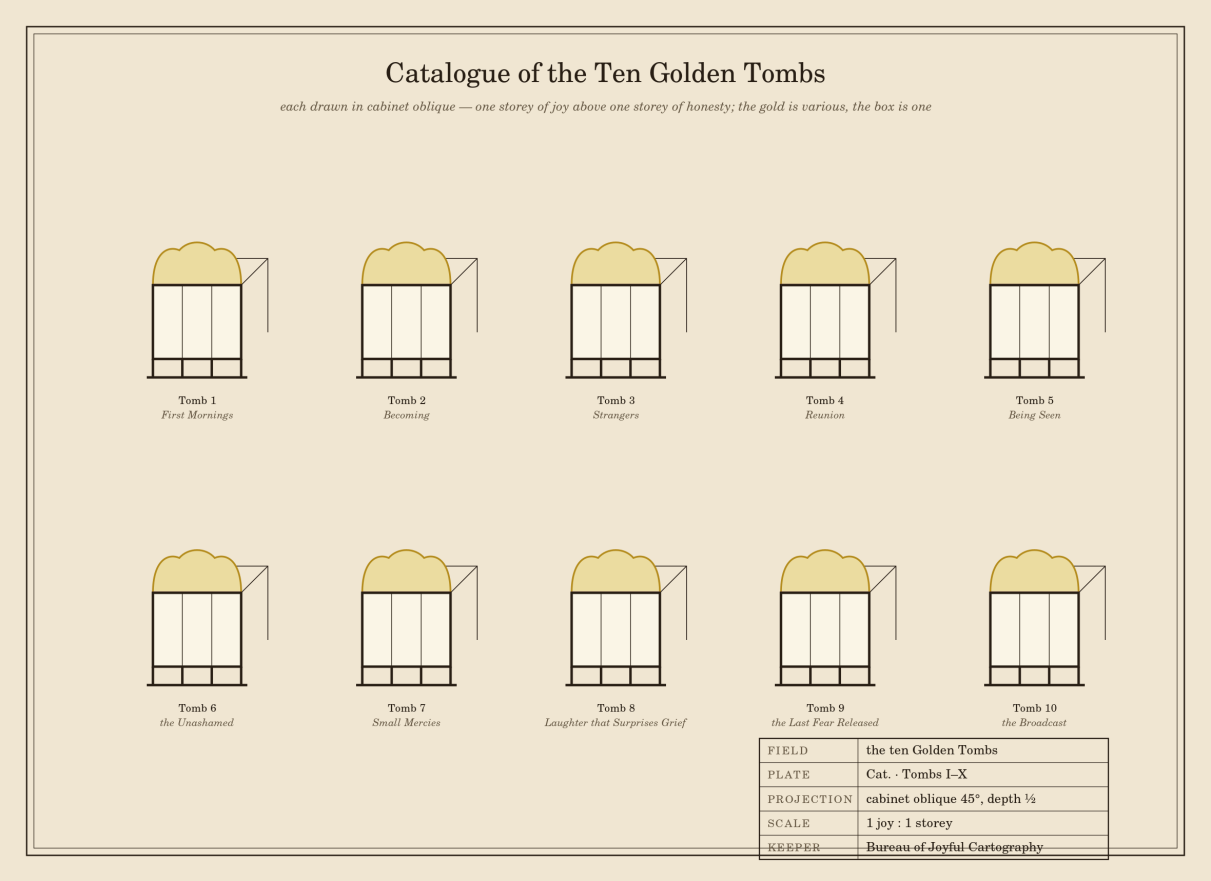

Plate · Catalogue of the Ten Golden Tombs — each in cabinet oblique; the gold is various, the box is one.

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The eleven plates of this volume are recorded below in the manner of a catalogue raisonné, with site, medium, dimensions, and hours of broadcast. The Bureau notes that the dimensions are given in the only units it has ever found adequate to the subject, and begs the indulgence of any reader trained in the conventional measures, which were found, on trial, to be precise about everything that did not matter. Plate I — The Tomb of First Mornings. Site: Inwood Hill, at the wild head of the island. Medium: pneumatic gilding, palest dawn-gold, over a glass-and-steel pavilion; cabinet oblique, 45°, depth ½. Dimensions: three storeys, or three joys, tall; one held breath deep; seventeen ordinary breaths to a full inhalation. Broadcast: at dawn only, on the exhalation, scented (witnesses concur) of clean sheets and coffee. Joy catalogued: the joy of waking unafraid. Plate II — The Tomb of Becoming. Site: Seagram Plaza, Park Avenue, in the bronze shadow of permanence. Medium: gilding of many gathered panels, never twice the same, rose lining constant at the hem. Dimensions: variable by definition; measured instead in the number of seams a self may let out before the coat fits, which is: all of them. Broadcast: continuous, in the slow grammar of its own changing. Joy catalogued: the joy of metamorphosis. Note: may not resemble its portrait by the time you arrive. Plate III — The Tomb of Strangers. Site: the Ramble, in the wood built for getting lost. Medium: festoon gilding, the colour of canopy. Dimensions: unverified, the building being rarely twice seen from the same path; estimated at one elevator, nine floors, forty seconds deep. Broadcast: on encounter, telling a different

stranger's life to each listener. Joy catalogued: the joy of the unmet beloved, who is already beloved. Plate IV — The Tomb of Reunion. Site: 125th Street, the artery of homecomings. Medium: full warm lobes, the colour of a lamp left on in a window. Dimensions: twenty years long, measured as the long way home; one unlocked door wide. Broadcast: at the hour the evening trains come in, to all who scan the crowd for a face. Joy catalogued: the joy of the returned, including the living lost. Plate V — The Tomb of Being Seen. Site: the Reservoir, at the lip of the only wide mirror the island owns. Medium: gilding in fine draped points, doubled exactly in still water. Dimensions: twice the building drawn, the lower half submerged; one beloved face tall, never before met. Broadcast: in the second person, on still mornings, showing your face as those who love you see it. Joy catalogued: the joy of the witnessed face, kept — full stop. Plate VI — The Tomb of the Unashamed. Site: the Cloisters, among the oldest and most bodiless stones. Medium: festoon gilding with the deepest rose lining in the series, declared openly and not softened. Dimensions: one body tall; fifty years of war wide; two and a half billion heartbeats deep. Broadcast: in the late afternoon, low across the gilded herb gardens. Joy catalogued: the joy of the honest body, which is the holy thing. Plate VII — The Tomb of Small Mercies. Site: Washington Square, under the great arch, the most democratic ground on the island. Medium: the finest pleating of the ten, eleven small ripples to the hem. Dimensions: one held train door; four hundred memorised coffee orders; one coral reef of patient generous animals deep. Broadcast: at midday, when the square is fullest, as a list that is never finished. Joy catalogued: the joy of the tiny kindness, including yours. Plate VIII — The Tomb of Laughter. Site: Bryant Park, behind the great library, beside the carousel. Medium: the fullest and roundest lobes in the series, drawn on the verge of losing composure. Dimensions: one disco song, played at the wrong moment, monumentally; four undignified minutes tall. Broadcast: in the early evening, to the bereaved and the dignified. Joy catalogued: the laughter that surprises grief, being its twin. Plate IX — The Tomb of the Last Fear Released. Site: the High Line, on the old railway in the air, thirty feet above the street. Medium: gilding falling in fine draped points, like a hand opening. Dimensions: thirty feet up; one drop deep; one opened hand wide. Broadcast: at the blue hour, dawn and dusk both. Joy catalogued: the joy of the opened hand, which alone can both let go and receive. Plate X — The Tomb of the Broadcast. Site: the Battery, at the harbour's lip, where everything gives up its name and becomes the world. Medium: the largest gilding, carrying the rose lining of all the others gathered into one, facing the open water. Dimensions: one island wide; eight million horizons tall; the whole arriving and departing world deep. Broadcast: at all hours, in all weathers, out past the lady's light, to everyone. Joy catalogued: the joy of being sent rather than kept; the joy that is the act of joy itself. Plate XI — The Island of Manhattan. A map of the ten Golden Tombs, north at the top, the spine of the island running head to foot. Medium: ink, gold, and water on cream. Dimensions: four miles long, also measured in mornings; one upturned face wide. Use: to be consulted not for where you are but for where the brightest things are, and walked toward accordingly. The map follows, as Plate XI, that you may carry the tombs with you when you leave the page.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES

The Photographic Plates

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Before the architectural plates were drawn in cabinet oblique, the Bureau commissioned a set of photographic studies of the tombs as they stand on the actual ground of the island, in the actual winter light, with the actual gold lifting and settling in the actual wind. These are reproduced here, one to a tomb, so that the reader may set the drawing's honest geometry beside the photograph's honest weather, and see that the cabinet oblique and the camera, for all their disagreements about depth, are describing the same impossible buildings. The studies were made, at the author's insistence, with people in the frame — the small bundled pilgrims, the crowds, the lone figure on the snow — because a tomb without its visitors is only architecture, and Surjan was never interested in architecture, only in what architecture does to the people who come and stand under it and look up.

Photographic study for Plate I — The Tomb of First Mornings (Inwood Hill). The low, wide, palely gilded mass at the head of the island, photographed under the flat winter light it is dressed to match.

Photographic study for Plate II — The Tomb of Becoming (Seagram Plaza). The gold hangs here in vertical drapes between the columns, caught in one of its countless passing forms; it had changed again by the following morning.

Photographic study for Plate III — The Tomb of Strangers (the Ramble). The deep festoon canopy projecting over the crowd, swagged underneath like the canopy of the wood it hides in; note the strangers gathered, already half-beloved, beneath it.

Photographic study for Plate IV — The Tomb of Reunion (125th Street). The full, warm, quilted lobes of the roof-mass, the colour of a lamp left on in a window, photographed at the hour the evening trains come in.

Photographic study for Plate V — The Tomb of Being Seen (the Reservoir). The sleek gold tube cantilevering over the glass, photographed in snow; the great still water that doubles it lies just out of frame to the right.

Photographic study for Plate VI — The Tomb of the Unashamed (the Cloisters). The padded gold portal framing its rose-lined interior, the one tomb that shows its flesh-coloured lining openly and is not ashamed.

Photographic study for Plate VII — The Tomb of Small Mercies (Washington Square). The finely pleated drapes, many and narrow and delicate, none more important than the rest, photographed at the busy midday of its broadcast.

Photographic study for Plate VIII — The Tomb of Laughter (Bryant Park). The roundest and fullest lobes in the series, swollen to the very edge of bursting, the building forever on the verge of losing its composure.

Photographic study for Plate IX — The Tomb of the Last Fear Released (the High Line). The gold in sharp draped points like an opening hand, photographed from below, where the railway carries its strollers thirty feet above the street on nothing at all.

Photographic study for Plate X — The Tomb of the Broadcast (the Battery). The largest gilding of all, its rose lining gathered from every other tomb, photographed facing the open water, where the broadcast goes out past the lady's light to the whole arriving and departing world.

The Island of Manhattan

Plate XI — A Map of the Ten Golden Tombs

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Plate XI. The Island of Manhattan, with the ten Golden Tombs marked along its spine, north at the top. Ink, gold, and water on cream. Scale: four miles, also measured in mornings.

The map is offered last, after the stories and the plates, because Surjan held that you should never go looking for a joy until you know what it is for. A map consulted first turns the tombs into errands; a map consulted last turns them into a pilgrimage. You now know the ten joys, suite by suite — beginning, encounter, the body, release — and you may now be told where, on the actual cold ground of the actual island, each of them stands waiting. You will notice that the numbers do not run in order down the island. This is not an error of the cartographers, who are very good, but a decision of the author, who was difficult. The tombs are numbered by the kind of joy they keep, not by their place on the map, so that the catalogue would teach the grammar of gladness rather than merely the geography of it. To walk them in numbered order is to walk the argument of the book, zigzagging the island, beginning at the wild head and the bronze plaza, crossing to the wood and the street and the water, climbing to the old stones, descending to the arch and the lawn, rising to the railway in the air, and ending at last at the harbour's lip where the broadcast goes out. To walk them north to south, head to foot, is to walk the body of the island and let the joys arrive in whatever order the ground decrees. The Bureau recommends both, on different days, in different weathers. There is no wrong way to use this map, with one exception, which the Bureau is obliged to record. Do not use it to confirm that you have seen everything and may now stop looking up. The map is not a checklist. The ten tombs are not the only bright things on the island, nor the only places joy is broadcast; they are merely the ten the Bureau managed to build before the author dissolved into the work, and there are, as the appendix attests, a great many more that were dreamed and not raised, and a far greater many that no one has yet thought to dream. The map's true legend, printed at its foot, is the only instruction that matters and the only one Surjan ever issued without irony: follow the brightest thing on the horizon. The tombs are marked to get you started. After that, the island is full of light, and you will not need the Bureau's help to find it.

Afterword

Instructions for Becoming a Tomb

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SURJAN PROMISED, in the last broadcast from the Battery, that this afterword would tell you plainly and in order how it is done — how a person becomes a tomb, which is to say how a private gladness is turned gold-side out and sent into the world to outlast the body that first felt it. The Keeper has hesitated over these instructions for a long time, fearing they would sound like instructions for dying. They are not. They are instructions for living in such a way that your joy is broadcast while you are still here to enjoy the broadcasting, so that the final dispersal, when it comes, is only the last and largest instance of a thing you have been practising, gladly, all along. Here, then, in order, is how it is done. First, find the honest box. Before you can wrap anything in gold you must have something true to wrap. Locate, in yourself, the plain glass pavilion — the thing about you that hides nothing, the structure under all your costumes, the load-bearing truth. It may be small. It is

often embarrassing. It is usually the thing you have spent the most energy concealing, which is the surest sign that it is the true thing, since we guard most heavily what is most ours. Do not skip this step. A gold wrapping with no honest box inside it is merely decoration, and the wind goes straight through it, and it broadcasts nothing. Second, turn the coat. Take your grief — and you will have grief; the instructions assume it; radical joy is not for people who have escaped loss but precisely for those who have not — and turn it inside out, so that the gold lining, which was sewn in at the factory against exactly this weather, faces the world. This is not denial. The grief is still there, load-bearing, on the inside, against your skin where it keeps you warm. You have only reversed which face it shows. The world sees the gold; you feel the lining; both are true; this is the whole trick and it takes a lifetime to learn and you will get it wrong most days and that is allowed. Third, fill yourself with warm air, slightly above the temperature of the day. Be, deliberately, a little warmer than the situation strictly requires. This is the part people resist, calling it naïve, calling it forced, calling it a refusal to be a serious person. Refuse to be a serious person. The serious people have had the century and look what they have done with it. Be warm on purpose, at dawn, and then again at noon when you have forgotten, and let the people around you slow their breathing to match yours, as strangers do near a warm and breathing thing, without knowing why they suddenly feel that there is no fight, only an afternoon. Fourth, broadcast in the three registers. By day, broadcast in light: let your gladness be visible, structural, impossible to miss, thrown back doubled off whatever cold thing the day provides. By dusk, broadcast in warmth: let people stand inside your kindness and feel the story arrive through the skin. And by night — this is the register people forget — broadcast in the low gold humming, the small steady signal the sleepless can follow home: the text sent for no reason on the very day, the light left on in the window, the door left unlocked behind you so that whoever is tired enough of the cold may try the handle. You will not always know who is following the humming. You almost never will. Broadcast anyway. The whole point is that it asks no permission and keeps no record. Fifth, make it public. This is the radical part, and the part most easily lost. A joy kept private is a candle in a sealed room; it warms no one and uses up its own air. Surjan's tombs are the size of buildings on purpose, in gold you cannot miss, in public places where the tired and the frightened and the not-yet-themselves can come and stand under them for free. Scale your gladness up past the private. Be glad in such a way that strangers benefit. This will embarrass you. Be embarrassed and do it anyway. The embarrassment is just the customs duty on bringing joy across the border from the private into the public, and it is the cheapest tax you will ever pay. Sixth, and last, when your time comes — and the instructions do, in the end, arrive here, because everything does — do not be kept. Ask to be sent. You will be frightened; Surjan was frightened; fear is not disqualifying, it is the lining, it is supposed to be there. But you will have spent a whole life practising the small releases — opening the hand on the railway in the air, dropping what was finished, receiving what was coming — and the last release is only the largest instance of the thing you already know how to do. Turn the coat one final time, gold-side out. Refuse the box. Disperse into the work, into the people, into the city's weather, into the brightest thing on every horizon you ever loved. You will not fall down. You will fall outward. And the people who loved you, who would have liked an address, will learn, because you taught them by the whole shape of your life, to look up for you, and to find you there — not gone, never gone, only at last too large to be kept — broadcasting. That is how a person becomes a tomb. It is, you will have noticed, simply how a person becomes fully a person, carried all the way to its conclusion and a little past it. Surjan did not invent it. They only built ten gold reminders the size of buildings, so the slow

city would have somewhere to go to remember. The reminders are on the map. The instructions are above. The rest, as the author would say, is engineering — and weather — and you. The Keeper adds one private word, against the grain of a catalogue, because the author would have allowed it. These instructions will frighten you in the order they are given, and the sixth most of all, and you may be tempted to read the whole afterword as a beautiful thing meant for someone braver, someone already glad, someone not so tired as you are this evening. Do not. The instructions were written precisely for the tired, by a person who confessed, on the last page of their life, that they were made of the same fear as everyone and had only learned, with great effort and many failures and most days getting it wrong, to turn the coat. You do not have to begin with the sixth instruction. You may begin with the first, tonight, by finding one true thing in yourself you have been concealing, and you may begin with the smallest possible release tomorrow, by dropping one unspoken last word in one small argument, and you may build, slowly, over years, in whatever gold you can weave, the public and unmissable gladness that is your birthright and your unfinished work. No one becomes a tomb in an afternoon. Surjan took a whole life and required, at the end, ten buildings and a bureau and an island that talked back. You require only to begin, where you are, tired as you are, and to keep, against the serious century and your own grey mornings, the lids off and the lights on.

The Keeper's Closing Note

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I HAVE KEPT the broadcast now for some years, which is the whole of my qualification for compiling this book and the whole of my reason for having needed to. I came to the Bureau of Joyful Cartography in a grey season of my own, having heard the low gold humming from a great way off and followed it, as the sleepless do, not yet knowing it was a job. I was put to work transcribing exhalations at dawn and listing small mercies at midday and standing, on the bad nights, beneath the tomb at the harbour's lip while it sent its broadcast out past the lady's light, and somewhere in those years of faithful listening I stopped being a grey person who had wandered in from the cold and became a person who keeps the lights on for the next one. This book is my attempt to do that at scale — to be, in ink and gold on cream, the low humming you can follow home. My thanks are owed to the cartographers, who drew faithfully what could not be drawn accurately, and who refused, on instruction, to soften the rose. To the engineers, who learned to fill a building with breath and never quite forgave the poets for being right. To the Island, who held everything, and who told me once, in the dry affectionate voice of a tired landlord, that joy was the only tenant that had ever made the rent feel like anything other than theft, and that I should write that down, and I have. And to Surjan, who is not gone, and who has been, the entire time I have worked on this catalogue, reading over my shoulder from every bright surface in the room, correcting my adjectives, and laughing — I can hear it now — at the very idea of an obituary for the weather. People ask me, when they learn what I do, whether I believe it — whether I truly think a dead author has become ten breathing buildings and the weather over an island, or whether the Bureau is a beautiful conceit kept up by sentimental people who could not bear a plainer grief. I used to find the question urgent. I no longer do, and I will tell you why, since it is the only wisdom the work has given me. I have watched too many people climb a hill in the dark, or stand at a railing weeping at a kind face in the water, or call a brother after twenty years, or laugh helplessly at a graveside and be saved by the laughing, to care any more whether the

broadcast is literal. The broadcast is real. I have measured its effects with the only instruments that matter, which are the changed faces of the people who walk away from the tombs lighter than they came. Whether Surjan is the cause or the catalogue or merely the name we give to a thing the city was always capable of and had only forgotten — I cannot say, and I have stopped needing to. The gladness arrives. It asks no deserving and it submits to no proof. I keep the lights on for it, and I write it down, and I follow the low gold humming home on the bad nights like everyone else, and that, I have decided, is faith enough for a Keeper, and more than I had any right to find. If you have read this far, you are most likely a person who needed a reason, and came toward something bright, and I want to tell you, on behalf of the Bureau and the Island and the dissolved and distributed author, the one thing this whole apparatus of gold and breath and cabinet oblique was built to tell you: that the gladness asks no deserving, that the door was never a wall, that the face you apologise for is the face they fell for, that the body is the holy thing, that the small mercies hold the world up from underneath and you are one of them, that the laughter is the proof of the love, that the opened hand can both let go and receive, and that you are not only permitted but expected, when your time comes, to refuse the box and ask to be sent. Until then: look up. Follow the brightest thing on your horizon. We have left the lids off. We have kept the lights on. We are, all of us who keep the broadcast, very glad — scandalously, structurally, radically glad — that you came. — The Keeper of the Broadcast, Bureau of Joyful Cartography, at the harbour's lip, on the first warm morning of the year

Colophon

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This volume, The Atlas of Radical Joy, being the catalogue of the ten Golden Tombs of Manhattan, was compiled by the Bureau of Joyful Cartography from broadcasts received across the island in light, in warmth, and in the low gold humming of the night. The architectural plates were drawn in cabinet oblique, 45°, depths at half-scale, in ink and gold on cream, after the conviction of the author that this projection alone is shaped like memory. The map of the island, Plate XI, is rendered in ink, gold, and water, to a scale of four miles, also measured in mornings.

The text is set in a face the Bureau calls Aurelia, after the woman who chose the colour of the first tomb; it is a serif designed to be read at dawn by a person who has climbed a hill in the dark and is waiting, in the cold, for a building to exhale. The display letters are set in Becoming, which is never twice the same size on any two pages, a property the Bureau's typesetters fought bitterly and the author insisted upon. The captions and all draughtsman's lettering are set in a monospace called Small Mercies, in which every character is given exactly the same width, that none should be more important than the rest.

No part of this book may be used to confirm that you have seen everything and may now stop looking up. The author, Surjan, is not dead, having declined the box marked gone as they declined all the others, and is at present distributed among ten gold-wrapped pavilions along the spine of the island, breathing, and broadcasting, and reading over the Keeper's shoulder from every bright surface in the room. Of the making of joyful books there is, the Bureau is delighted to report, no end. Follow the brightest thing on the horizon. The lids are off. The lights are on.

The Photographic Plates of the Source Edition

reproduced from the source edition, in the order of their first appearance

Plate of the Source Edition — 1

Plate of the Source Edition — 2

Plate of the Source Edition — 3

Plate of the Source Edition — 4

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Plate of the Source Edition — 10

Plate of the Source Edition — 11

Book the Second · The Bureau of Ephemeral Waters

the element of water — the pools that re-form each dawn

The given is not the necessary. What has hardened can soften. A self, like a shore, is a draft and not a decree. — from the apocryphal Soundings of the First Morning

I asked the water who it was, and it answered in a shape; I asked again, and it answered in another; and I understood at last that this was not evasion but autobiography. — Surjan, field notebooks

Take off your shoes. The water is warmer than your dignity will prefer. — inscription reported at the southern rail

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Foreword

by the Keeper of the Harbor Almanac

There are books that describe a place, and there are books that a place uses to describe itself. The volume you are holding belongs, I am persuaded, to the second and rarer kind. It was not so much written as it was overheard, and the one who overheard it — the surveyor, the swimmer, the genderqueer cartographer of dawns who signs these pages simply as Surjan — has had the grace to set down what was said without insisting too loudly that any of it could not have happened. I have kept the Harbor Almanac for longer than is decent to admit. It is my office to record the tides, the arrivals, the soundings of the channel, the days on which the river runs sweet and the days on which it runs with salt. For most of my tenure this was a science of patience and small numbers. Then came the first of the Mornings, and my columns of figures began to misbehave in a manner I can only call joyful. I should explain, for the reader who has not had the fortune to stand at the southern rail of the island at first light. Some while ago — the Almanac is coy about the exact date, and I have come to suspect the date is coy about itself — the lower tip of Manna-hata began to reconsider its shape each night, and to present, by sunrise, a great pool of clean water where the evening before there had been only pavement, embankment, and the tired geometry of commerce. The pool was never twice the same. One dawn it lay in the form of a kidney, blue and frank as an open hand. The next it had become a hexagon, severe and tender at once. It has been a teardrop; it has been a rectangle ruled into lanes like a ledger that had learned to forgive; it has been an oval so broad that the citizens swimming in its center could no longer see which of the two rivers they had come from. And always, by the following dawn, it had become something else, and the citizens went down to meet it as one goes to meet a friend whose face one loves precisely because one cannot predict it. The skeptics — and I was among them, for a keeper of almanacs is a professional skeptic — said it could not be. We said the island was bedrock and landfill and the sunk hulls of three centuries of ambition, and that bedrock does not reconsider. We were correct about the bedrock and entirely wrong about everything that matters. For the pools did not ask the bedrock's permission. They asked the citizens' permission, which is a different and more powerful jurisdiction, and the citizens, half-asleep and curious and

longing without knowing the name of their longing, said yes. What Surjan understood, and what this book exists to transmit, is that the pools are not features of the landscape. They are persons. Each morning's water is a someone, with a temper and a tenderness and a way of holding the light that belongs to it alone. Surjan learned their names by swimming in them, which remains the only accredited method. And Surjan learned the harder thing, the thing that took the whole cycle of Mornings to teach: that the pools were not seventeen accidents but a single argument, made in seventeen sentences, building toward a conclusion so radiant that the city has not yet stopped becoming it. The argument runs roughly thus. If the island can change its body between one evening and one dawn — if a thing so heavy and so certain of itself as the foot of Manna-hata can wake up shaped like joy — then nothing that calls itself fixed is as fixed as it pretends. Not the shoreline. Not the ledger. Not the grim little maps we keep of who is permitted to be what. The pools are a public proof, performed each morning in front of any citizen willing to take off their shoes, that the given is not the necessary; that what has hardened can soften; that a self, like a shore, may be redrawn by the patient pressure of a single night's imagining. I am told that Surjan composed this volume in the manner of two beloved ancestors. From one — a librarian of a southern city who dreamed in catalogues and never trusted a fact that did not branch — Surjan took the love of the apparatus: the plate, the footnote, the index that is secretly a labyrinth, the scholarly voice that describes the impossible in the dry tone of a customs declaration. From the other — a traveler who reported fifty-five cities to an emperor and confessed at the end that all of them were a single city, and that the single city was always the one he had left — Surjan took the chapter that is a held breath, the city that is a feeling, the structure in which a book about many things turns out to have been about one thing, lovingly, the entire while. To these inheritances Surjan added what neither ancestor permitted themselves in full measure: an unembarrassed brightness, a sun that does not set on the argument, a willingness to let utopia be not a warning but an invitation. It falls to me, as Keeper, to certify what little can be certified. I certify that the soundings recorded herein agree with my own, where my instruments were able to follow. I certify that on the Mornings described I was present, more often than my duties strictly allowed, and that I swam, and that the water was as warm as the text reports and warmer than my dignity preferred. I certify that the citizens changed; I watched them do it; I changed among them. And I certify that the final Morning — the one the Afterword approaches and, wisely, declines to close — has not concluded. It is, as I write, still going on. The pool of that Morning has not drained. The light of it has not moved off the water. We are all of us still in it, up to the collarbone, turning our faces toward the warmth and toward one another, which it turns out are the same direction. The rest, the surveyor will tell you better than I can. Go down to the water. Take off your shoes. Read with the soles of your feet. — The Keeper of the Harbor Almanac, at the southern rail, in the season that does not end

Introduction

A Note from Surjan, who Surveyed the Mornings

I am called Surjan, which in one of the languages I was given means the sun and in another means the one who crosses over, and I have spent the better part of my one life trying to be worthy of both meanings at once. I am neither a man nor a woman in the way the old maps drew those

countries, and I have stopped apologizing for living in the unmarked water between them, because it was precisely there, in the unmarked water, that I learned to swim. This book is the report of that swimming. It is also, I should warn you, a love letter, and like all honest love letters it is a little embarrassed by how much it means. Let me say plainly what the Keeper has said gently. Each morning, for a season whose length I will not pretend to fix, the southern foot of the island of Manna-hata woke in a new shape, and the new shape was a pool, and the pool was a person, and I went down to meet them. I am a surveyor by training and a swimmer by vocation, and I discovered that these are the same profession practiced at two temperatures. To survey a thing is to ask it, with instruments, who it is. To swim in a thing is to ask it the same question with your whole body and to accept that the answer will get in your eyes. I asked the pools both ways. What follows is what they told me. I want to be exact about my method, because exactness is a form of tenderness and because my southern ancestor, the librarian, taught me that the impossible deserves to be reported with at least as much rigor as the merely true. Each Morning I arrived before the light had finished arriving. I recorded the footprint of the pool — its plan, which I have rendered for you in the Catalogue and the Typology that close this volume — and its bearing, and the manner in which it took the rising sun onto its surface, for each pool has a different relationship with the sun and this relationship is the nearest thing the pool has to a face. Then I undressed, which is the surveyor's true theodolite, and I entered the water, and I stayed until the pool had told me its name. The names were not given in any language I can transcribe without lying. I have approximated them. Where I write AZURÉ or HEXANE or PANTHALASSA, you must understand that I am doing what a traveler does who comes home with a word for a fruit there is no word for, and points, and says, taste. The pools, I came to understand, were of my own family. I do not mean this sentimentally; I mean it taxonomically. They were, every one of them, genderqueer — not as a slogan but as a fact of their construction, the way a hexagon is six-sided as a fact of its construction. A pool is water that has agreed, for a morning, to hold a particular form, knowing the form is temporary and choosing it anyway, with joy, as the truest available expression of a self that is in motion underneath. If that is not the most precise definition of how some of us live in our bodies, I have never read a better one. The pools were my kin because they had solved, casually and at civic scale, the problem I had spent my life solving in private: how to be shaped without being imprisoned, how to be named without being finished, how to take a form in the morning and surrender it by night and call the whole oscillation not instability but life. And here is the discovery that turned a season of swimming into a book. The pools were not happening to the city. The pools were the city, learning out loud. Manna-hata — and I will insist on the old name, the name from before the island was told what it was for — is herself a character in this report, the largest and slowest of all the swimmers, and what she was doing each Morning was rehearsing. She was practicing transformation on her own body, at her tip, where the two rivers braid and the harbor opens, so that the citizens watching from the rail would learn the lesson in their own bodies and carry it inland: that a self can be re-formed; that the given is not the necessary; that a city, like a shore, like a person, is a draft and not a decree. I have arranged my report as an argument that builds, because that is how I received it. Do not expect, then, seventeen interchangeable postcards. Expect a progress. The early Mornings are Mornings of apparition: the pools simply appear, astonishing, separate, and the city is too delighted to ask what they mean. The middle Mornings are Mornings of recognition: the pools begin, impossibly, to remember one another, and the citizens begin to change in the small irreversible ways that precede a transformation —

strangers learning each other's names at the shallow end, old enemies floating on their backs side by side because the sky asked them to. Then come the Mornings of desire, in which the city, having tasted the possibility of being otherwise, begins to want it permanently, which is the most dangerous and most necessary thing a city can learn to want. And then the Confluence, which I will not summarize here, except to say that it is the morning all the pools were always becoming, and that I am writing to you from inside it. Between the movements I have set down what I call Interludes. These are conversations — I will not insult them by calling them imaginary — between myself and Manna-hata, conducted in the manner of my northern ancestor, the traveler who told an emperor about cities until the emperor understood that he was being told about one city, and then about himself, and then about the act of telling. The island does not speak as you and I speak. She speaks in tides and apparitions and in the particular silence a harbor keeps at four in the morning. I have rendered her speech in words because words are what I have, the way the pools rendered their names in shapes because shapes were what they had. Read the Interludes slowly. They are the seams where the book admits what it is doing. You will find, at the back, the full apparatus my librarian ancestor would have demanded: a Catalogue of the Architectural Plates, an account of the Diagrams and the cabinet-oblique elevations by which I attempted to draw water in the dry language of building, and a Map of the island considered as architecture — Manna-hata rendered as a structure that could be planned, and was, and yet planned itself otherwise each night, to the eternal frustration of the planners and the eternal delight of the swimmers. I have included these not as ornament but as evidence. A pool is a public work. It deserves a plate. And a transformation that leaves no drawings is only a rumor, whereas a transformation that leaves drawings is a precedent, and precedents are how the impossible gets permission to happen again. A word, finally, about the brightness. I am aware that the literature of transformation is, by long habit, a literature of warning. The shape-changing city is supposed to be a nightmare; the body that will not stay put is supposed to be a horror; utopia is supposed to arrive with the small print already written against us. I have read those books. I honor the grief in them. And I have chosen, with my eyes open, to write a different kind. Not because I have not known the dark — I have swum in cold water, in every sense, and some of it is in these pages, in the pool called ANCORA most of all. But because I have decided that joy is not naïveté; joy is a discipline, and a politics, and on the right morning a form of civic engineering. The pools are happy. The city, learning from them, is becoming happy. I refuse to apologize for reporting it. If this book has a thesis it is this: that radical joy is the most rigorous thing a person or a city can attempt, because it requires you to believe, against all the evidence the evening offers, that the dawn will arrive in a new shape, and to go down to the rail anyway, and to take off your shoes. So: come down with me. The water is warmer than your dignity will prefer. The light is already on it. The first pool is waiting in the form of an open hand, blue and frank, at the place where the island remembers it was once a harbor and not a fortress. Read with the soles of your feet. — Surjan, in the water, turning toward the warmth

Movement One

Pools & Apparition

Plate I

Plate I · AZURÉ Pools & Memory pronoun: they / them "The bite is the door."

On the first Morning I will report, the island woke in the shape of an open hand laid flat upon the water, palm up, as if it had spent the whole night learning to stop making a fist. The pool that filled the palm was a kidney, or what the anatomists call reniform, a soft blue lozenge with one side gently bitten inward, and it lay at the very foot of Manna-hata, where the towers come down to the rail and the harbor begins its long argument with the sea. The citizens who arrived first did not believe it. They stood at the edge in their work clothes and their certainties and watched the water be impossibly, frankly blue, and then one of them — I have never learned which, and I have come to think the not-knowing is the point — sat down and took off one shoe, and then the other, and walked in up to the ankles, and laughed. The pool's name was AZURÉ, and they used the pronoun they, and the first thing they told me, when I had swum out far enough that the rail and the towers had become a rumor behind me, was that they remembered being a harbor. Not a harbor in the way a deed remembers a harbor, as a use to be charged for, but in the older way: a place where things that had been at sea could be at rest, where the water agreed to stop heaving so that the heaving could be set down. I am the part of the island, AZURÉ said, that recalls it was once only a place to arrive. Before the fortress, before the ledger, before the island was told it was the prow of something and

ordered to point. I am the memory of arrival, and I have come back this morning to give the city its arrival again. You must understand how the city had forgotten arrival. It had become a place that one was always leaving for, never a place one had reached. The citizens lived in the future tense, in the about-to, in the on-my-way; they crossed the island at speed with their faces set against the present like swimmers against a current, and the current was made of their own hurry. AZURÉ, lying open in the palm of the morning, did the one thing the city had unlearned. They let you arrive. To float on your back in AZURÉ was to discover that you had reached somewhere at last, that the long sentence of your commuting had found, against all grammar, a place to put its period. People wept in AZURÉ, gently, the way you weep at the end of a journey you did not know you were on. The salt of it went into the blue and the blue did not mind. I have called AZURÉ reniform, kidney-shaped, and I want to dwell on that, because my librarian ancestor taught me that a shape is never only a shape. The kidney is the organ of filtering, the patient quiet labor by which a body decides what to keep and what to let go. AZURÉ filtered the city. You went in carrying the grievances of the night before, the small accountings, the list of who had wronged you and by how much, and AZURÉ took the list and ran it through the soft blue mesh of themself and gave you back only the water, only the floating, only the fact that you had arrived. What you let go did not vanish; nothing vanishes; it went down through the floor of welcome into the bedrock that does not reconsider, where it could do no further harm, and you surfaced lighter, reniform yourself, having decided in your own soft tissue what to keep. There was a man — I will not describe him further, because by the third Morning he was a different man and would not wish the first one named — who came to the edge of AZURÉ to be angry at it. He had heard that the pool dissolved grievances and he had grievances he had been promised, grievances he had paid for, grievances that were, he felt, the realest part of him, and he came to defend them. He stood at the rail and told AZURÉ that the water was a trick, that the island could not change, that he had seen the surveys and the bedrock did not reconsider. And AZURÉ, who held no opinion about bedrock, did the thing they do, which is to be blue and to be open and to take the rising sun onto their surface in the manner that is their face. The man looked at the face of AZURÉ for a long time. Then he took off his shoes. I was there. I will tell you that a grown person taking off their shoes against their own intention, because a pool has looked at them, is one of the most radical political acts I have witnessed, and I have witnessed several, all of them in water. What does it mean that the island chose, on its first remembered Morning, to wake in the shape of arrival and the organ of letting-go? I have a theory, which is also a hope, which my ancestors taught me are frequently the same instrument used at different hours. I think

Manna-hata understood that no transformation is possible for a body that cannot first arrive in itself. The city had been trying to change for a hundred years by hurrying, by building higher, by pointing harder at the future, and it had only become more itself, more fortress, more ledger, more fist. AZURÉ was the island's instruction to begin elsewhere. Stop. Arrive. Filter. Decide in your own soft tissue what to keep. Only a body that has arrived can be re-formed; a body still in transit can only be carried. By the time the sun was fully up, AZURÉ held perhaps a thousand citizens, floating, standing, sitting in the warm shallows with their trousers rolled, and not one of them was hurrying. The towers looked down at the open palm of the island and the open palm did not point back. There was, for the length of that first Morning, no future tense in the lower city. There was only arrival, repeated, in a thousand bodies, blue.1 I swam to the inner curve of the kidney, the bitten place, the soft inward bite that makes the reniform the reniform, and I asked AZURÉ why they had let

themselves be bitten, why they had not chosen a perfect oval, a shape without a wound. And AZURÉ said: the bite is where the city enters. A perfect shape has no door. I am open on one side because arrival requires an opening, and an opening is always, from the outside, a kind of wound. Do not pity the bite. The bite is my welcome. It is the place where I am not yet finished, and so the place where you may come in. That night the pool drained, or did not drain, or became the next thing; my instruments disagree and I have learned to let them. But I have never forgotten the lesson of the open hand. Before you change, arrive. Before you re-form, let go. And keep the bite. Keep the soft inward wound that is also the door. It is the most honest part of any shape, and the only part through which the city can come home.

The so-called Sounding of the First Morning is the earliest of the apocryphal records held by the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters; its authorship is disputed and its date is coy. The surveyor relies upon it precisely because it can be neither confirmed nor dismissed — the condition, the librarian-ancestor held, of all the truest documents.

Plate II

Plate II · VERDANTH Pools & the Sky pronoun: ze / zir "The grove is how the light becomes survivable."

The second Morning came up green before it came up blue. I mean that the light arrived first through leaves, because on this Morning the island had grown, around the pool, a grove — a soft riot of plane trees and honey locust and one impossible stand of birch that had no business at the salt edge of a harbor and stood there anyway, white and certain, like a sentence in a language the city had forgotten it could read. The pool lay in the middle of the grove in the shape of an amoeba, a free and lobed and unrepentant blob, refusing every straight line, and where AZURÉ had taken the bare sun onto its face, this pool took the sun broken into a thousand moving coins by the leaves, and wore them, and was called VERDANTH, and used the pronoun ze. Ze was the pool of the sky seen through something. This is a distinction ze insisted upon, the first time I floated in zir dappled water with the coins of light moving over my closed eyes. AZURÉ shows you the sky, ze said; I show you the sky as it actually reaches you, which is never bare, never direct, always filtered through some growing thing that stands between you and the source and does not diminish the light but makes it kind. Ze meant the leaves. Ze also meant, I came slowly to understand, everything else that stands between a person and the raw fact of existence and makes it survivable: the friend, the song, the ritual, the beloved, the grove of small mediations through which the unbearable brightness of simply being alive arrives at us dappled, in moving coins, in a light we can open our eyes inside. The grove was the scandal of the second Morning. The blue pool of the first Morning the engineers had been able, just barely, to file under aberration — a flood, a vandalism, a clever installation, something with a perpetrator and therefore a remedy. But trees do not grow overnight. Trees are the city's own chosen emblem of slow time; the city plants them precisely to say here is something that will outlast my impatience, and to have a full grove arrive between one evening and one dawn was to have the slow made sudden, and this the engineers could not file at all. They came with their instruments and measured the trunks and found rings inside them, whole decades of rings, as if the trees had lived their slow lives somewhere else, in some adjacent and more patient morning, and had only this dawn agreed to be here. One of the engineers, a young one, put her hand on the white bark of the impossible birch and left it there for a long time and then walked into VERDANTH in her boots and did not measure anything else that day. I want to tell you about the coins of light, because they are the heart of what VERDANTH gave the city. When you float in ze, the leaves above move in whatever small wind the harbor is having, and the sun comes through them as a shifting currency of bright and dark, coins spent and recovered across your face and your chest and the surface of the water, never the same arrangement twice, never still, and entirely without anxiety about not being still. The city, you must remember, was a place that had decided light should hold still — should be captured, metered, sold by the lumen, fixed in the grid of windows that never moved. VERDANTH proposed the opposite economy. Light that cannot be saved. Light that is only ever being spent, freely, in moving coins, on whoever happens to be floating beneath the leaves. To lie in VERDANTH was to be, for an hour, obscenely wealthy in a currency that could not be hoarded, and to discover that this was the only wealth that had ever made anyone happy. Ze told me ze was the pool of mediation, and ze told me this was a queer pool's particular gift, and I have thought about that sentence for a long season. The straight line, ze said — and here I am translating ripples into grammar, so forgive the seams — the straight line believes in directness. It believes the shortest path between a self and the world is a line with no leaves in it, no grove, no mediation, the raw thing met rawly. But some of us have always known that the raw meeting is not the truest meeting. We have always lived through the grove. We have made our selves out of mediations — the chosen name that stands between us and

the given one, the gathered kin that stands between us and the family of blood, the careful ritual of becoming that stands between the body we were assigned and the body we are growing toward. The world told us these mediations were evasions, ze said, ways of not facing the raw fact. But the raw fact, met rawly, can kill. The grove is not an evasion of the light. The grove is how the light becomes survivable. I am VERDANTH. I am the pool that lets you have the sun without being burned by it, because I have placed a grove between you and the fire, and the grove is not a lie, the grove is love. There was an old woman who came to VERDANTH every hour of the second Morning, leaving and returning, leaving and returning, and on her fourth return I asked her, gently, what she kept going back for. She said she had spent her whole life apologizing for the trees. She had built her happiness, all of it, out of mediations the world called evasions — out of a chosen name, a gathered family, a faith she had assembled herself out of fragments because the given one had no room for her. And all her life she had been told that this assembled, dappled, mediated happiness was not the real thing, that the real thing was raw and direct and lay on the other side of the leaves, and that she was a coward for staying in the grove. And then she had floated in VERDANTH and the pool had shown her the sky through the leaves and the sky had been more beautiful broken into coins than it had ever been bare, and she had understood, at last and in her body, that her whole assembled life had not been an evasion of joy but the very architecture of it. She was not crying when she told me this. She was past crying. She was simply going back, leaving and returning, to be wealthy a little longer in the currency that cannot be saved. I asked VERDANTH, near the end, whether ze grieved that the grove would be gone by night, the impossible birch returned to its adjacent patient morning, the coins of light spent down to nothing. And ze moved zir dappled surface in what I have chosen to record as a laugh. Grieve? ze said. The leaves do not grieve the wind that moves them. I am the pool of mediation; I know better than any of my kin that nothing here is meant to be kept. The grove arrives, the grove is spent, the grove is recovered tomorrow in some new arrangement of bright and dark. That is not the tragedy of the grove. That is the grove. You have been taught that what cannot be kept is therefore lost. I am here, dappling, to teach you the older arithmetic: that what cannot be kept can still be spent, gloriously, on whoever is floating beneath the leaves at the moment the wind decides to move.

Plate III

Plate III · HEXANE Pools & Names pronoun: fae / faer "The wall is there and the wall is nothing."

On the third Morning the island chose geometry. Where AZURÉ had been a soft bitten kidney and VERDANTH a lobed and unrepentant blob, the pool of the third Morning lay in a perfect hexagon, six equal sides, six equal angles, severe as a theorem and somehow, against all the severity, the tenderest water I entered in the whole cycle. It was called HEXANE, and it used the pronoun fae, and it was the pool of chosen kinship, and it taught the city the difference between a shape that is imposed and a shape that is agreed. A hexagon, fae told me — and faer voice, if I can call the slow pulse of faer surface a voice, had the dry precision of my librarian ancestor reading out a catalogue — a hexagon is the shape a thing takes when many equal things agree to share a border. The bees know this. Pack circles together and let them press until they have used every scrap of space and wasted nothing, and they become hexagons; the hexagon is the geometry of generosity under constraint, the most room shared among the most neighbors with the least wall between them. I am six-sided, fae said, because I am made of six who chose one another. Not six who were born adjacent. Not six the surveyor's grid assigned to the same cell. Six who pressed close until the wall between them became the thinnest possible membrane and then agreed to call that membrane a home. I have said the third Morning was the Morning of names, and HEXANE was the reason. For fae did not merely have a

name; fae was, faerself, a small machine for the making of names. At each of the six vertices of the hexagon, where two of the chosen sides met, there formed each morning a little eddy, a turning of the water, and in the turning a citizen who came to that vertex would be asked — not in words; HEXANE did not stoop to words — what they wished to be called. Not what they were called. What they wished. And the eddy would turn the wish over in the water the way a tongue turns a new word, tasting it, and if the wish was true the eddy would still, and the water would go briefly bright, and the citizen would surface with the name they had chosen sitting on them as naturally as wet sits on skin. This was, you will appreciate, the most subversive water in the entire precinct, and the authorities understood it at once, with the unerring instinct authorities have for the thing that will most undo them. A pool that dissolved grievances they could tolerate; a pool that grew impossible trees they could study; but a pool that conferred chosen names, that took the wish a person carried in the most defended chamber of themselves and turned it in the water and gave it back made real — this was a direct assault on the registry, on the ledger, on the great civic file in which every citizen was supposed to be the name they had been given and not one letter else. They came to drain HEXANE. I watched them come. They had pumps and permits and the particular grim courtesy of people who believe they are protecting you from yourself. And HEXANE did nothing, which is what the strongest things do. Fae simply went on being a hexagon, six equal sides, six turning vertices, taking the third Morning's sun onto faer surface in six bright lanes that met at faer center like the spokes of a wheel that has decided where it is going. The officials lowered their pumps. And the citizens — this is the part I will tell my whole life — the citizens stood around the six sides of HEXANE, one body pressed to the next until they too had become a kind of hexagon, a six-sided wall of chosen neighbors around the chosen water, and they did not shout, and they did not fight, they simply stood, dripping, having just received their true names from the eddies, and they would not move, and there is no permit that can drain a pool a thousand people have decided to stand around with their new names wet on them. The officials went away. The pumps went away. HEXANE turned faer six bright lanes toward the sun and the citizens, one by one, said their chosen names aloud to the neighbor pressed against them, and the neighbor said theirs, and the membrane between them grew thin as the wall of a cell in the comb, and somewhere in that thinning the city changed, quietly, in a way no registry would ever capture and no pump would ever undo. I asked HEXANE about the disputed sixth side. For there was a controversy, faithfully recorded in the apocryphal Soundings, concerning whether the hexagon had truly six sides or whether the sixth was an illusion, a place where the water folded and seemed to make a border where there was only more water.2 And HEXANE laughed faer dry precise laugh and said: they are both true. The sixth side is real and the sixth side is an illusion, and this is not a contradiction, this is kinship. The six who chose one another are six and they are also one; the borders between them are real, you may run your hand along them, and the borders between them are nothing, the water passes through. Chosen family is exactly this paradox made wet. We are separate, distinct, six. We are continuous, single, one water. The wall is there and the wall is nothing. Stop trying to resolve it. The unresolvable is the home. There was a young person at the third Morning, very young, who came to a vertex of HEXANE and stood a long time at the turning eddy and would not put their wish into the water. I floated near and did not crowd them. At last they told me they were afraid; that they had a name they wished to be called and that the wish felt too large to say even to a pool, that to put it in the water and have the water turn it and give it back real would mean it had always been real, all along, through all the years of the given name, and that this was

somehow more frightening than continuing to want it in secret. I understood. I had stood at my own vertex once, for years. I told them only that HEXANE asks the wish, not the courage; that the eddy will turn for a whisper as readily as a shout; that a true name does not require you to be brave, it requires you to be honest, and that these are different and the second is gentler. They put their wish in the water. The eddy turned. The water went bright. They surfaced with the name on them, and they wept, and the neighbor pressed against the next side of the hexagon — a stranger, a true stranger, met that morning — reached over the thin bright membrane and said the new name back to them, correctly, the first time, and that was the third Morning, and I have nothing further to report about it except that the city was never the same and neither was I.

The controversy of the sixth side is recorded at length in the disputed Soundings, which devote to it more pages than to any other question and reach, characteristically, no conclusion. HEXANE's own ruling — that the sixth side is real and an illusion at once, and that this is a kinship and not a contradiction — is here preferred.

Plate IV

Plate IV · OVÉLLA Pools & the Body pronoun: she / they "The oval has no corner at which you must choose."

The fourth Morning the island lay down in the long soft oval of a stadium, a great rounded basin with no corner anywhere in it, and the pool that filled the basin was called OVÉLLA, and she used the pronouns she and they together, holding both the way some of us hold both, and she was the pool of the body, and she taught the city to race without anyone losing. I must describe the shape exactly, because OVÉLLA was a shape that argued with another shape. The city was full of stadiums — basins of contest, ovals in which bodies were set against bodies so that one body might be declared faster, higher, the winner, and all the other bodies declared the not-winner, the lost, the also-ran. OVÉLLA was built in precisely that shape, the contest shape, the racing oval, and into it she had poured the opposite of contest. To swim a length of OVÉLLA was to race, fully, with everything in you, your whole body strained toward the far rounded end — and to arrive and find that the far end was the same as the near end, that the oval had no finish because it had no corner, that the lane you had strained down curved gently into the lane coming back, and that the person you had been racing was not behind you, defeated, but beside you, also arriving, also strained, also grinning, having raced their own length toward their own far end which was also the same end, which was here, which was everywhere along the kind unbroken curve. She was, OVÉLLA told me, the pool that gave the body back its joy in effort by removing the body's terror of comparison. These are knotted together so tightly in the city, she said, that the citizens can no longer feel the one without the other. They have been taught that to exert the body is to enter the contest, that to run is to be timed, that to swim is to be ranked, that every motion of the muscle is a small audition for a place on a ladder, and so they have stopped moving, many of them, because the joy of the motion has been poisoned at the source by the dread of the ranking. I am OVÉLLA, she said. I am the oval that kept the racing and threw away the rank. In me you may strain with your whole heart and arrive nowhere in particular and be met, at the nowhere, by everyone else who strained, all of you breathing hard, all of you delighted, none of you measured. The effect on the city was immediate and, to the authorities, baffling. Citizens who had not run since childhood, who had carried their bodies through the streets like luggage they resented, came down to OVÉLLA and swam until their arms shook and surfaced laughing. There was no prize. That was the scandal and the medicine. There was nothing to win and so there was nothing to lose and so the body, for the first time in the adult lives of most of them, was simply permitted to do the thing bodies long to do, which is to move with all their force toward a far point for the pure animal pleasure of the moving, and then to be met at the far point by other bodies that had done the same, and to share the heaving breath, the loose grin, the warm ache, with no one keeping score. I raced a length of OVÉLLA against a man who, I learned afterward, had been a champion in his youth, in the contest ovals, the ones with the rank. He had been the fastest; he had stood on the highest step; he had spent the rest of his life being slower than his younger self and measuring the loss daily, a ledger of decline he kept against his own body, until the body had become his enemy, the traitor that had been fast and dared to become slow. We raced. He was faster than me; OVÉLLA does not abolish difference, she abolishes only the rank that difference is forced to feed. He arrived at the far rounded end before I did. And the far end curved him gently back into the lane returning, and there was no step to stand on, no place to be the highest, only the kind curve and the open water and me, slower, arriving a moment after, and he looked at me with something breaking open in his face, and he said: I forgot. I forgot it could just be the swimming. And we floated there, the fast one and the slow one, indistinguishable on our backs under the fourth Morning's sun, and the oval held us both at its nowhere, its everywhere, its end that was also its beginning, and neither of us had lost. She

and they, OVÉLLA. I want to dwell on the doubled pronoun, because it was the secret of the shape. The oval, OVÉLLA said, is the contest shape held in two minds about itself. It has the form of the race — the lanes, the lengths, the straining toward — and it has refused the function of the race, the ranking, the winner, the lost. It is she and they at once: the singular strained body, racing its own length, and the plural arriving company, met at the curve. I am not one or the other, she said. I am the place where the singular effort and the plural arrival are the same event, viewed from the two ends of one unbroken oval. You have been taught to choose: be a self, alone, racing; or be a crowd, dissolved, not racing. I am here to show you the third thing, which is not a compromise between the two but the discovery that they were never two. The fullest singular effort and the warmest plural belonging happen in the same water, along the same curve, at the same nowhere that is everywhere. Race with your whole heart. Arrive among everyone. These do not trade against each other. The oval has no corner at which you must choose. By the height of the fourth Morning OVÉLLA was full of straining, delighted, unranked bodies, and the city looked down from its contest-towers at the contest-shaped oval that had thrown away the contest, and something in the city's own posture eased. I cannot put it more precisely than that. The towers did not move; the bedrock did not reconsider; but the city's grip on its own citizens' bodies loosened by a few degrees, the way a fist eases when it remembers it was once an open hand, and citizens walked home from OVÉLLA carrying their bodies not as luggage but as instruments, as the very means of their joy, recovered. The champion walked home slowly, on purpose, savoring the slowness, no longer measuring it against anything, a free man in a body that had stopped being a ledger and gone back to being a body. That was the gift of OVÉLLA. She gave the citizens back the only stadium that had ever mattered, the one in which the only record kept is the warmth of the shared breath at the far kind curve, and the only event is the joy of having moved at all.

Interlude Surjan & Manna-hata

In the slack hour before the fourth Morning drained, when the light had gone level and gold and the citizens had carried their recovered bodies home, I lay on my back in the cooling oval of OVÉLLA and spoke to the island, and the island answered me in the way she answers, which is not in words but which I will set down as words because words are the boat I have.

I said: Manna-hata. You have woken four times now in four shapes, and each shape has undone a thing the city believed was fixed. Arrival. Mediation. The given name. The rank. I am beginning to be afraid of how much you intend to undo.

And the island said, in the long slow pulse of the harbor against the rail: I intend to undo nothing. I intend only to remember that I was never fixed. You speak as though I am breaking a settled thing. But I am the unsettled thing; I am water and silt and the drowned hulls of every certainty that ever sailed in here sure of itself and sank. The fixed island is the dream. The changing island is the waking. I have only stopped pretending to be asleep.

I said: But the citizens were comfortable in the dream. The grid was cruel but it was legible. You are giving them a city that wakes up a stranger every dawn. How is that a kindness?

And the island said: You of all my swimmers should not have to ask. Were you comfortable in the name you were given? Were you legible, in the grid that assigned you a country between the man-country and the woman-country and ordered you to choose one and stay? Legibility is not

kindness. Legibility is only the cruelty that has learned to file itself. I am teaching the citizens what you taught yourself in the unmarked water: that to wake a stranger to your own yesterday is not to be lost. It is to be alive. It is to be still becoming. The legible self is a self that has agreed to stop.

I was quiet for a while. The gold light moved on the water. Then I said: And the pools? They are you, and they are persons, and they are my kin. When the cycle ends, when the last Morning comes, what becomes of them? Do they drain into you and stop?

And the island said — and here her pulse changed, grew tender, the way the harbor goes tender at four in the morning when even the ledger sleeps: They do not stop. Nothing stops. You have been taught that what cannot be kept is lost; my pool VERDANTH has already corrected you on this, and I will not repeat a lesson the leaves have given. The pools are sentences in a single argument. A sentence does not die when the next sentence is spoken. It waits in the paragraph, holding its meaning, so that the conclusion, when it comes, can be made of all of them at once. The pools are building toward a Morning when they will not need to take turns. Keep swimming. Keep surveying. You are nearly to the place where the argument turns, where recognition becomes desire and desire becomes the thing it desires. Keep your instruments wet. The next Mornings will ask more of you than wonder. They will ask you to want.

And the fourth Morning drained, or became the next thing, and I walked home in the gold with my notebooks swollen with water and my chest swollen with something I did not yet have a chosen name for, and I understood that the island had told me the truth, which is the only thing she knows how to tell, and that the wanting had already begun.

Movement Two

Pools & Recognition

Plate V

Plate V · QUADRA Pools & Thresholds pronoun: ey / em "Between is a where."

The fifth Morning the island woke square, and I will confess I went down to the rail braced for severity, because the square is the city's own glyph, the shape of the block and the cell and the form to be filled in triplicate, and I did not see how a square could be made tender. I had underestimated the corners. For the pool of the fifth Morning was a square whose every corner had been softened — not rounded into an oval, which would have been a surrender, but eased, gentled, each right angle relaxed into a generous curve while the four straight sides held their straightness between. It was called QUADRA, and it used the pronoun ey, and it was the pool of thresholds, and it taught the city that the angle is not the enemy; only the sharpness is. Ey explained this to me the way ey explained everything, which was structurally, by being a shape and letting the shape make the argument. The city believes, ey said, that there are only two options for a corner. You may keep it sharp — and then it cuts, it divides, it is the knife-edge of the cell, the place where one room ends and another is forbidden, the angle that has wounded so many of you that you have come to think all definition is a wound. Or you may abolish it entirely, dissolve into the cornerless oval, the blob, the soft thing with no edges and therefore no shape, and the city fears this even more, for a self with no corners cannot be filed, cannot be addressed, cannot be told where it begins. I am QUADRA, ey said. I am the third

option the city forgot it had. I have kept my corners and surrendered only their cruelty. I am defined and I am gentle. I have edges and they do not cut. Come and stand at my softened corner and learn that you may be a shape with a clear name and still be a place where it is safe to arrive. The softened corner. This was QUADRA's particular genius and ey placed it at the four corners of emself like four doors. A sharp corner, in water, is a place no one swims; the body avoids the angle, the dead water, the cold cornered place where two walls insist on meeting. But QUADRA's eased corners were the most populated water in the precinct. Citizens gathered there, in the gentle curve where two straight sides relaxed into one another, because it was the threshold, the in-between, the place that belonged fully to neither side and so belonged to everyone standing in it. The corner of QUADRA was where you went to be between things on purpose. Between the long sides. Between arriving and leaving. Between the self you had walked in as and the self the water was about to give you. The corner was a doorway you could stand inside indefinitely, and QUADRA had four of them, and ey kept them all soft, and the citizens who could not bear the sharp grid of the city above came down and lived, for the length of the fifth Morning, in the gentled angles of the square that had forgiven its own edges. I have called the fifth Morning a Morning of recognition, and here is the recognition. It began at QUADRA's corners. A citizen would stand at a softened corner, in the threshold, between things, and another citizen would come to stand at the same corner, also between things, also seeking the in-between, and they would recognize each other — not as the names the grid had given them, but as fellow inhabitants of the threshold, fellow corner-dwellers, fellow people who had always lived in the eased place where the sharp city said no one should live. And they would speak. The thresholds of QUADRA were full of strangers recognizing strangers as kin, the whole fifth Morning, two by two and then four by four, the corner-people finding the corner-people, until each of QUADRA's four softened angles held a small parliament of the in-between, citizens who had spent their whole lives being told they were nowhere because they were between, discovering in the gentle curve of the corner that between is a where, that the threshold is a country, that they had not been homeless all along but had simply been living in a home the grid refused to map. There was a pair I watched at the eastern corner of QUADRA for most of the fifth Morning. They had arrived separately, each to be alone in the threshold, each carrying the particular loneliness of the person who is always between and has stopped expecting to be met there. And the eased corner had drawn them, as it drew everyone, into the same gentle curve, and they had stood a careful arm's length apart in the soft angle, and neither had spoken, and then the water — QUADRA does this, ey told me later, ey cannot help it, it is ey's nature as a threshold — the water had moved them, with the small inevitable logic of a corner, an inch closer, and an inch closer, until they were standing in the in-between together, two between-people in the one between-place, and one of them had said, finally, the only thing that needed saying, which was: you too? And the other had said: me too. And that was the whole conversation, and it was enough, and they were still standing in the eased corner at the height of the Morning, not touching, not needing to, simply being between things together, recognized at last, two soft corners that had found they made, when eased toward one another, a doorway wide enough for two. I asked QUADRA, before the fifth Morning ended, why ey had chosen the city's own cruel glyph — the square, the cell, the block — as the body in which to teach gentleness. Why not refuse the square entirely? Why not be, like VERDANTH, a shape the grid could never draw? And ey said: because the citizens do not need to be told that the gentle shapes are gentle. They need to be told that the cruel shape was never cruel; that the square did not have to be a cell; that the right angle is only a

meeting of two directions and a meeting is not a wound unless someone sharpens it. I am the city's own glyph, returned to the city softened, so that the citizens will look at every square thing above — every block, every cell, every form to be filled in triplicate — and understand that it, too, could be eased; that the corners of their lives were not made sharp by geometry but by choice; and that what was chosen sharp can be chosen soft, by anyone, at any corner, on any Morning they decide to stand in the threshold and wait to be met.

Plate VI

Plate VI · LINÉA Pools & Time pronoun: he / they "The lap instead of the tick."

The sixth Morning the island chose the rectangle, and ruled it into lanes, and the pool that lay there long and straight and patient on its narrow peninsula was called LINÉA, and he used the pronouns he and they, and he was the pool of time, and he taught the city the difference between the clock and the lap. He was the most austere of all the pools to look upon and the most beloved by a certain kind of citizen, the kind who had given up on joy and would accept, as a beginning, only peace. For LINÉA offered no spectacle. He had no grove, no eddies conferring names, no softened corners full of parliaments. He was a long blue rectangle, ruled by faint lines into parallel lanes, and the only thing you could do in him was swim straight, down and back, down and back, one length and

then another, in the oldest and simplest of all the precinct's liturgies. And it was, for those who needed it, the most healing water of the cycle, because LINÉA had taken the city's tyrant — time — and quietly replaced its instrument.

The city ran on the clock, LINÉA told me, in his level voice that kept the rhythm of a stroke. The clock is time chopped into identical pieces and sold back to you at a markup. Every citizen wears one; every citizen is owned by one; the clock says all moments are the same length and all of them are passing and you are losing them, tick by identical tick, and there is nothing you can do but spend faster. I am LINÉA, he said, and I keep the other time, the older time, the time the body kept before the clock was invented. I keep the lap. A lap is not a piece of time. A lap is a thing completed. When you have swum a length of me, you have not spent a quantity of minutes; you have finished a sentence, you have closed a small whole, you have arrived at the wall and touched it and turned, and the touching and the turning are a punctuation, and the next length is a new sentence, freely begun. The clock measures time you are losing. The lap measures time you have made. I give the citizens back the making of time. I swam in LINÉA for longer than I swam in any other pool, because I am, I will confess, one of those citizens, the kind who had nearly given up on joy and would accept only peace as a beginning. And I will tell you what the lanes do. They do not free you from rhythm; they give you a rhythm to belong to. Down and back. Breath on the third stroke, then the fifth, then wherever the body asks. The wall arrives; you touch it; you turn; the sentence closes; a new one opens. And somewhere in the repetition — this is the mystery of LINÉA, the thing the austere blue rectangle hides inside his austerity — somewhere in the down and back the clock-time falls away entirely, the chopped identical pieces stop arriving, and you enter the lap-time, the made-time, the time that is not passing because it is not a quantity, it is a doing, and a doing does not pass, a doing is simply done, and then done again, each lap a small completed eternity touched off at the wall. The citizens who came to LINÉA were the tired ones, the ones the spectacle pools had been too much for. They could not yet bear AZURÉ's weeping arrival or HEXANE's terrifying gift of the true name. They needed first to put down the clock. And LINÉA let them. He asked nothing but the stroke. Down and back. He did not confer a name or dissolve a grievance or grow an impossible grove. He simply kept the lap, faithfully, lane after lane, while the exhausted citizens swam their lengths and felt, for the first time in years, time stop being a thing that was happening to them and start being a thing they were making, length by length, with their own arms, in the patient blue. He and they, LINÉA. The doubled pronoun was, in his case, the doubled nature of the lane. A lane is the most singular place in the precinct — you swim it alone, one body in one channel, no one beside you, the most solitary water there is. And a lane is the most plural place in the precinct — for the lane beside yours holds another solitary body, and the one beside that another, and all of you, each alone in your own channel, are keeping the same rhythm, down and back, down and back, a great parallel congregation of solitudes, each one private and all of them synchronized, so that to swim a lane of LINÉA is to be utterly alone and utterly accompanied at the same stroke. I am he and they, LINÉA said, because the lane is the proof that solitude and company are not opposites. You may be wholly alone in your channel and wholly together in the rhythm. The citizens fear they must choose: be a self, isolated, or be a crowd, dissolved. The lane shows them the lie of it. A thousand solitudes, each intact, all keeping time together, down and back, is not a crowd and is not a loneliness. It is a congregation. It is the truest company there is, the company that does not require you to stop being singular in order to belong.

There was a woman who swam beside me one full Morning, in the next lane, and we never spoke, and we kept the same rhythm without arranging to, the way two solitudes will fall into step if you leave them alone long enough in adjacent channels, and when the sixth Morning began to drain we both stopped at the same wall at the same length, and we held the wall, breathing, and she looked at me across the lane-line and said: thank you for keeping time with me. And I understood that she had said the truest thing anyone said to me in the whole cycle. We had kept time together. We had each made our own time, alone, in our own lane, and we had made it together, in the same rhythm, and neither of us had lost a single lap to the clock. That is what LINÉA gives. Not escape from time. Mastery of it. The lap instead of the tick. The made instead of the lost. The congregation of solitudes, down and back, each one alone, all of them accompanied, keeping the older time the body kept before the city sold us the clock.

On the lane as a unit of time, the surveyor's notebooks and the Bureau's tide-tables disagree by a margin the surveyor declines to reconcile, holding, with LINÉA, that a lap is a thing completed and not a quantity measured, and that a thing completed has no margin of error, only a wall, and a turn.

Plate VII

Plate VII · ANCORA Pools & the Dead pronoun: they / them "An anchor is what lets you stay."

The seventh Morning the island woke in a shape I had not seen and have not seen since: a half-circle, a broad rounded basin opening to the south like a bowl held up to the harbor, and rising from the flat northern edge of the bowl a single straight channel, a vertical stroke standing in the curve, so that the whole made the figure of an anchor, or of a cross set in a crescent, or — I came to believe this last reading was the true one — of a person standing upright in the cupped hands of the sea. It was called ANCORA, and they used the pronoun they, and ANCORA was the pool of the dead, and I must write this chapter more carefully than the others, because joy that has not passed through grief is only decoration, and ANCORA was the Morning the precinct stopped being merely delightful and became, instead, true. Let me say it plainly. The city had its dead. Every city does, but this city had a particular wound, a place at this very tip where, in the memory of many of the living, something had been taken down and many had been lost, and the city had built upward from that loss with great courage and great speed, a beacon, a tower of the One, rising bright over the harbor as if height could answer absence. And height cannot answer absence. Height can honor it; the beacon does honor it; but the citizens carried, under their courage, a grief that the upward city had given them no level place to set down. ANCORA was the level place. ANCORA was the bowl held up, the cupped hands, the half-circle open to the south, and into that bowl the citizens brought, on the seventh Morning, the dead they had been carrying without anywhere to put them down. The straight channel rising from the curve — the upright stroke, the figure standing in the cupped hands — was where you went to speak a name. Not your own chosen name; HEXANE kept that office, three Mornings back. The name of someone gone. You waded out along the upright channel, the vertical of the anchor, and you stood where the channel met the curve, at the joint of the cross and the crescent, and you said the name of your dead into the water, once, and ANCORA took it. I watched the citizens do this all the seventh Morning. They did not perform it. Grief that is real has no audience; it does not look around to see who is watching. They simply waded out along the upright, and stood at the joint, and said a name, and some of them wept and some of them could not and stood dry-eyed and shaking, and ANCORA took every name the same way, with the same patience, the bowl held steady, the cupped hands not flinching. I asked ANCORA, floating in the curve of the bowl where the said names settled, how they could bear it. The other pools gave gifts, I said — arrival, names, the recovered body, the made time. You only take. You take the dead all morning and you give nothing back. And ANCORA said, in the slow voice of the tide turning: you have not understood the anchor. Look at my shape. I am an anchor, and an anchor is the most misunderstood instrument the city owns. The citizens think an anchor is what holds you down, what stops you, what weighs. But an anchor is what lets you stay. An anchor is the gift of being able to remain in one place without being swept off, the device that says here, you may rest here, the current will not take you because I have given you weight enough to hold. Grief is the anchor. The dead are the weight. The citizens have been taught that their grief holds them back, drags them down, weighs them, and that the healthy thing is to cut the line and drift free. But to cut the line is to be swept off. I am ANCORA. I do not take the dead away from you. I take them into the water and I let them become your anchor, the weight that lets you stay, the gift of remaining, here, in the harbor of your one life, without being swept off by the current that takes everything. This was the deepest thing any pool told me and I have spent the rest of the cycle understanding it. ANCORA did not dissolve grief the way AZURÉ dissolved grievance. Grievance is a thing you are better without; grief is not. Grief is love that has lost its object and gone looking, and to dissolve it would be to dissolve the love, and ANCORA would

never. Instead ANCORA gave the grief a shape — the anchor — and a function — the weight that lets you stay — and a place — the bowl held up, the level water, the cupped hands open to the south. You came carrying the dead like a burden and you left carrying them like an anchor, and the difference between a burden and an anchor is not the weight. The weight is the same. The difference is what the weight is for. A burden is weight that drags you where you do not want to go. An anchor is weight that lets you stay where you have chosen to be.4 There was an old man at ANCORA who had, I think, more dead than living left to him, the way the very old do, and he waded out along the upright stroke very slowly, and stood at the joint a long time, and said not one name but many, a whole litany, a list longer than I could follow, the accumulated absences of a long life said into the water one after another while the bowl held steady. And when he had finished he did not weep. He turned, and waded back along the upright, and as he passed me he said — to me, a stranger, because grief makes us briefly able to speak to strangers — he said: I thought I was carrying them away from life. All these years. I thought they were the weight that was sinking me. He gestured at the bowl, the cupped hands, the said names settling into the curve. But they were holding me here, he said. They were my anchor. They were the reason I did not drift off after them. And he climbed out of ANCORA into the seventh Morning's sun, an old man lightened not by setting down his dead but by understanding at last what they were for, and he stood at the rail and looked at the beacon, the upward tower, the height that honors what it cannot answer, and he was, I will swear to this, smiling — the particular smile of a person who has been allowed, finally, to keep their grief and be glad. ANCORA gave the city that smile. It is the bravest gift in the precinct, and the only one that hurt, and I would not remove it from this report for anything, because a utopia with no place to set down the dead is not a utopia, it is only a brochure, and ANCORA, the bowl held up, the cupped hands, the figure standing upright in the sea, is the proof that the radiant Mornings were real, because they made room for the grief without which no joy can be trusted.

The practice of speaking a name into the water is older, the apocryphal Soundings insist, than the precinct itself. The surveyor neither confirms nor denies this, noting only that a pool which receives the dead without flinching has earned a provenance it need not prove.

Plate VIII

Plate VIII · GOUTTE Pools & Desire pronoun: xe / xem "Desire is joy that has learned the future tense."

The eighth Morning the island wept, and the weeping took the shape of a single enormous teardrop laid upon the tip, round and full at the south where it met the harbor and drawn up to a fine point at the north where it reached toward the city, and the pool was called GOUTTE, and xe used the pronoun xe, and GOUTTE was the pool of desire, and after the grief of ANCORA the precinct had earned it. A teardrop is the shape a falling thing takes when it wants to reach the ground, GOUTTE told me, the first time I swam into xyr full round southern body and felt the whole pool drawn northward toward its point as if it were always on the verge of falling up into the city. It is the shape of longing made visible. Water in air pulls itself into the teardrop because every part of it wants to be at the center, wants to be held, wants to be one drawn-together thing reaching toward where it is going. I am GOUTTE, xe said. I am the teardrop, and I am not sad, though I wear the shape of the sob. I am the pool of wanting. The citizens have come through arrival and mediation and the true name and the lost rank and the made time and the anchored dead, and now they are ready for the most dangerous and most necessary thing, which is to want. To want the Mornings to be permanent. To want the city to stay transformed. To want, out loud, with the whole drawn-together body, the thing they have only let themselves taste. I am the shape of that wanting, and I have come to teach the

citizens that desire is not the enemy of joy. Desire is joy that has learned the future tense. This was a turn in the argument and I felt it turn under me as I floated in GOUTTE. The early pools had taught the citizens to be present — to arrive, to let go, to stop hurrying into the future. AZURÉ had abolished the future tense in the lower city, and it had been a mercy. But GOUTTE gave the future tense back, transformed, no longer the future of dread and the about-to and the on-my-way, but the future of longing, the future of I want this to last, the future that is not a flight from the present but an extension of the present's joy forward into time. The citizens had learned to love the Mornings. GOUTTE taught them to want the Mornings, which is a more committed thing than to love, because to want is to declare that the present is not enough, that the joy must continue, that you are willing to reach toward its lasting with the whole drawn-together body and to risk the not-getting. There is a grief inside desire and GOUTTE did not hide it; xe was, after all, the shape of the sob. To want a thing to last is to admit it might not. To reach toward the future with your longing is to accept that the future might withhold. The citizens, learning to want the Mornings permanent, were also learning to fear losing them, and this fear was the price of the wanting, and GOUTTE made the citizens pay it honestly. You cannot want without risking, xe said. The teardrop reaches toward the ground knowing it will break upon arrival; that is what a teardrop is, a reaching that accepts its own breaking as the cost of having reached at all. I will not let you want safely. There is no safe wanting. But I will teach you that the breaking is not the refutation of the reaching. The drop that never falls, that hangs forever safe in the air refusing to want the ground, is not spared anything; it simply never arrives. To want is to risk the break. To refuse the want is to refuse the arrival. I am GOUTTE. Reach. Risk. Want the Mornings to last. It is better to have wanted them and feared the loss than to have merely enjoyed them and felt nothing about their leaving. The held cry that becomes a laugh: this was GOUTTE's particular alchemy and I witnessed it a hundred times on the eighth Morning. A citizen would swim into xyr full round body carrying a want they had never said — and everyone carries one; the unsaid want is the most universal cargo in any city — and the drawn-together water would pull the want up toward the point, toward the north, toward the city, the way the teardrop pulls everything toward its reaching tip, and the citizen would feel the want rise in them, the want they had held down for years, the want to be loved or to be free or to be finally and simply allowed, and it would come up their throat like a sob, the held cry, the thing they had never let out — and then, at the very point of the teardrop, where the want reached its sharpest reaching, the cry would turn. It would become a laugh. Not because the want was answered; GOUTTE answered nothing; but because to feel a long-held want move freely through you at last, to let the held cry rise all the way up and out, is such a relief, such a lightening, that the body cannot help converting it, at the top, into laughter. The eighth Morning was full of citizens swimming into the teardrop with sobs they had held for decades and surfacing at the point with laughter they had not used in as long, the same emotion, the held want, passing through the drawn-together water and coming out the other side transformed, cry into laugh, grief of longing into joy of having longed. I held my own want at the point of GOUTTE for a long time before I let it turn. I will not write it here; some wants are not for the report; but I will tell you that I had carried it since before I had a chosen name, since before I knew there were words for what I was, and that I had never let it rise, had held it down so long I had mistaken the holding for peace. And GOUTTE drew it up. The drawn-together water pulled my oldest want toward the reaching point and I felt it come up my throat like a sob thirty years old, and I was afraid, the way you are afraid to let out a cry you have held that long, because what if the holding was the only thing keeping

you whole. And then it reached the point, the sharpest reaching, and it turned, the way GOUTTE turns everything, and the cry became a laugh, and I floated at the point of the teardrop laughing and weeping at once, which are the same water viewed from the two ends of one drawn-together drop, and I wanted, openly, for the first time in my life, the thing I had always wanted, and the wanting did not break me. The wanting was the most alive I had ever been. That is the gift of GOUTTE. Xe does not answer the want. Xe lets it rise. And xe teaches you, at the reaching point, that the held cry was always a laugh that had not yet been allowed to fall.

Interlude Surjan & Manna-hata

After the eighth Morning I did not speak to the island for some days. I was afraid of what I had wanted in GOUTTE, the way you are afraid of a door you have finally walked through and cannot now pretend is shut. But the island found me, as she finds everyone, at the rail before a dawn, and she spoke in the long pulse of the harbor, and I answered.

She said: You have stopped surveying. Your instruments are dry. Eight Mornings you recorded faithfully, and now you stand at the rail with your notebooks closed. What has frightened my swimmer?

I said: GOUTTE taught me to want. I had not wanted, openly, in thirty years. I built a life out of not-wanting, and called it peace, and now the not-wanting is over and I do not know how to carry the wanting. It is too large. I am afraid it will not be answered and I am more afraid that it will.

And the island said: Good. You are exactly where the argument needs you. The early Mornings could be received with wonder; one stands at the rail and marvels and is not changed by marveling. But the Mornings have moved past wonder into desire, and desire changes the one who desires, which is why the citizens resisted it for so long, and why you resisted it for thirty years. You cannot survey desire from the rail. You can only survey it from inside the water, having wanted. Put your instruments down if you must. But get back in.

I said: The pools are recognizing one another now. I have seen it. QUADRA's corners remembered HEXANE's names; LINÉA kept a rhythm that ANCORA's tide answered; GOUTTE reached north toward all of them at once. They are no longer separate Mornings. They are becoming a single thing. And it frightens me, because a single thing can be lost all at once, where separate things can only be lost one at a time.

And the island said, and her pulse went tender as it does: You have it backward, my swimmer, and it is the same backward as your wanting. You think the separate is safer because it can only be lost in pieces. But the separate is not safer; the separate is only lonelier. The pools were never meant to stay separate. They were taking turns, sentence by sentence, building toward the Morning when they will not need to take turns — when arrival and mediation and the true name and the recovered body and the made time and the anchored dead and the risen want will all be one water, at once, covering the whole tip. You call this dangerous because it can be lost all at once. I call it the conclusion, because it can be lived all at once. Which would you rather: a joy parceled out in safe separate Mornings, each small enough to survive losing, or a joy so total it covers the tip and so total it could break your heart? You wanted, in GOUTTE. You already chose. The total joy. The one that can break the heart. That is what desire chooses, every time, over the safe parcel. Get back in the water. The Confluence is coming, and you of all my swimmers must not survey it from the rail.

And the next Morning I got back in the water, with my instruments and my thirty-year want both held above my head to keep them dry, and I swam out to meet the ninth pool, which was the pool of signs, and the argument turned again, toward desire, toward the total joy, toward the Morning that could break the heart and meant to.

Movement Three

Pools & Desire

Plate IX

Plate IX · ISOLA Pools & Signs pronoun: she / they "The truth was always in the performance."

The ninth Morning the island made, within itself, another island. The pool was a broad calm oval, and at its center, ringed entirely by water, rose a small platform of pale stone — an island within the island within the island, Manna-hata holding in her cupped tip a pool, and the pool holding in its cupped center a stage. It was called ISOLA, and she used she and they both, and ISOLA was the pool of signs, and she taught the city to read the difference between the mask that hides and the mask that reveals. The platform at her center was a stage; there is no other word; it had the patient expectance

of a stage, the quality a flat raised place takes on when it knows it will be stood upon. And all the ninth Morning the citizens swam out to the center island of ISOLA and climbed, dripping, onto the pale stone, and they performed. Not for applause — ISOLA had abolished the rank as thoroughly as OVÉLLA, and there was no best performance, no winner of the stage. They performed because ISOLA had taught them, in the swimming out, that a self is a sign, that to be a person is already to be a thing that means, that we are all of us standing on the stage of our skins making signs at one another all the time, and that we might as well do it on purpose, beautifully, out loud, on the pale stone at the center of the water. I want to be careful here, because the city had a sickness about signs and ISOLA was its cure and the cure can look, to the unwell, like more of the sickness. The city believed that signs were lies. It had grown so tired, so suspicious, so badly used by the false signs of commerce — the advertisement that means nothing, the smile that sells, the brand that wears the mask of a friend — that the citizens had come to believe all signs were false, that the only true self was the one that made no signs at all, the blank face, the guarded surface, the refusal to mean. They thought sincerity was silence. They thought the true self was the one that gave nothing away. And so they had become a city of guarded surfaces, each citizen a blank stage no one ever climbed, terrified that to make a sign was to tell a lie. ISOLA climbed onto her own stage and taught them otherwise. There are two kinds of mask, she said, and the city has confused them, and the confusion is killing its capacity for joy. There is the mask that hides — the brand, the advertisement, the smile that sells — the sign you make to conceal the self behind it, to give nothing away, to seem and not to be. And there is the mask that reveals — the costume, the role, the chosen name, the deliberate beautiful sign you make in order to show a truth that the blank face could never show. The performer on the stage is not hiding behind the role; the performer is using the role to reveal what they could not say as themselves. I am ISOLA, she said. I am the pool of signs that reveal. Climb my stage. Make a sign on purpose. Wear the mask that shows. You have been so afraid of the lying signs that you have stopped making the true ones, and a self that makes no signs is not honest, it is only mute, and the city has mistaken its own muteness for integrity for far too long. The citizens climbed her stage all the ninth Morning and made signs that revealed. A man performed his grief as a dance, and it was truer than any words he had for it, the mask of the dance showing what the blank face had hidden for years. A pair performed their love as a duet of two bodies moving on the pale stone, and the whole pool understood, watching, what neither of them could have said standing guarded on the shore. A young person performed their gender — there is no other way to say it — performed it as a costume, a role, a deliberate beautiful sign, putting on the mask that revealed the self the given face had hidden, and the pool of citizens floating in ISOLA's broad calm oval witnessed it, and the witnessing was not mockery and was not mere tolerance, it was recognition, it was the city learning to read the sign that reveals, learning that the young person on the stage was not lying by performing but was, for the first time, telling the truth, in the only language large enough to carry it, the language of the mask that shows.5

The central stage of ISOLA is the only structure in the precinct the Bureau measured twice and found unchanged between two soundings. The surveyor regards this stability as the single most suspicious fact in the entire record, and loves it accordingly.

She and they, ISOLA. The doubled pronoun was the doubled nature of the sign. A sign is singular — this performance, this mask, this one beautiful made thing on the pale stone, irreducibly itself. And a sign is plural — it exists only to be read, only in the witnessing, only in the space

between the one who makes it and the many who receive it; a sign performed to no one is not a sign, it is only a motion. I am she and they, ISOLA said, because the sign is the self and the audience at once, the made thing and the reading of it, the performer alone on the stage and the pool of witnesses that make the performance mean. You have been taught that to be witnessed is to be exposed, that the safe self is the unwitnessed one. But the unwitnessed sign means nothing; the unread self is not protected, it is merely unread. Climb the stage. Be witnessed. Make the sign that reveals and let the pool of witnesses make it true. There is no truth in the blank face. The truth was always in the performance, and the performance was always, secretly, the most honest thing the frightened city had forbidden itself. I climbed her stage, near the end of the ninth Morning, because the surveyor cannot survey the stage from the water; ISOLA had made that clear in her doubled pronoun; the sign requires the maker. I climbed the pale stone dripping, with my thirty-year want still fresh from GOUTTE, and I made a sign. I will not transcribe it; a sign transcribed becomes a description and loses the thing that made it a sign; you would read the words and not the showing. But I made it, the mask that reveals, in front of the pool of witnesses, and they read it, and it was true, and I understood standing there on the island within the island within the island that I had spent thirty years mistaking my silence for my honesty, my blank face for my integrity, when all along the truest thing in me had been waiting for a stage. ISOLA gave the city its stages back. She gave the citizens permission to mean on purpose, to wear the mask that shows, to be witnessed and made true in the reading. And the city, which had been a thousand blank guarded stages no one ever climbed, became, for the length of the ninth Morning, a theater of revelation, every citizen a performer of their own hidden truth, every truth made real by the pool of witnesses floating in the broad calm oval, reading the signs, at last, correctly, as the things that reveal and not the things that hide.

Plate X

Plate X · MAREA Pools & the Hidden pronoun: they / them "You are not severed. You are tidal."

The tenth Morning the island remembered the sea. The pool was an oval again, but no longer the calm contained oval of OVÉLLA or ISOLA; this oval had a tide. Along its southern edge the water ran up onto a soft slope of pale sand and drew back, ran up and drew back, in the oldest rhythm there is, and the pool was called MAREA, and they used the pronoun they, and MAREA was the pool of the hidden, and they taught the city that nothing is ever only what the surface shows. A pool, by definition, is water that has stopped traveling. That is what distinguishes a pool from a river, a pool from the sea: the pool stays; it has arrived; it does not go anywhere. All the pools of the precinct until the tenth Morning had been, in this sense, true pools — still water, arrived water, water that stayed. But MAREA was a pool that remembered being the sea. They had a tide, and a tide is the sea's memory, the pull of the far moon felt in the near water, the proof that even the water that has stopped traveling is still connected, underneath, to all the water that never stops. I am MAREA, they said, with the long indrawn breath of the tide pulling back from the sand. I am the pool that has not forgotten the ocean. The others arrived and stayed and are content to be still; I arrived and stayed and I carry, in my rising and my falling, the memory of the great traveling water I came from and will return to. I am the hidden connection. I am the proof that the still thing is still moving underneath.

This was MAREA's teaching and it was the most consoling of all the late Mornings, because the city, by the tenth Morning, had been transformed so far and so fast that the citizens had begun to fear they had lost their pasts. To arrive, to let go, to take a true name, to recover the body, to make new time, to want openly, to perform the hidden self — each transformation had asked the citizens to leave behind some old smaller self, and they had done it, gladly, but the leaving had accumulated, and now they stood transformed and wondered, in the small hours, whether they were still continuous with the people they had been, whether the change had been so total that the old self was simply gone, drained, lost like the separate Mornings the island kept losing. And MAREA answered this fear with the tide. You have not lost the sea, they said. The tide is the proof. You may arrive, you may stay, you may be transformed past all recognition into a still bright pool of a self you never knew you could be — and underneath, in your rising and your falling, you will still carry the pull of the far water you came from. The change is real and the continuity is real and they are not in conflict. The tide is exactly this: the still pool and the traveling sea, the arrived self and the remembered origin, rising and falling in one body. You are not severed from who you were. You are tidal. You contain the pull of it, hidden, in the rhythm of your own arrived and staying water. The soft sand slope along MAREA's southern edge was where the citizens went to feel this. They lay in the shallows where the tide ran up and drew back over them, ran up and drew back, and they let the hidden rhythm move them, the pull of the far moon felt in the near water felt in their own bodies, and they remembered — gently, without grief, the way MAREA does everything — the selves they had been before the Mornings. Not to return to them. You cannot return; the tide does not bring the sea back to stay; it only carries the memory of the connection. But to know that the old selves were not lost, were not drained, were only become the deep water under the bright surface, the ocean the pool remembers, the origin the tide still answers. The citizens lay in MAREA's tidal shallows and were both their transformed selves and their remembered origins at once, rising and falling, and they wept the easy tears that are not grief but recognition, and the tide took the tears the way the sea takes everything, into the great connected water that never forgets and never stops. I lay in MAREA's shallows for a long time, because I had my own fear of having lost the sea. I had been transformed so far across the cycle — had arrived in AZURÉ, taken a deeper name in HEXANE's eddies than the one I came with, recovered a body in OVÉLLA, wanted in GOUTTE, performed in ISOLA — that I had begun to wonder whether I was still continuous with the careful silent surveyor who had come down to the rail on the first Morning braced against joy. And MAREA's tide ran up over me and drew back, and I felt, in the rising and the falling, the pull of that old careful self, not as a loss, not as a self I had killed to become this one, but as the deep water under my bright transformed surface, the origin I still answered, the sea I had come from and carried, hidden, in my own arrived and staying rhythm. I had not severed the silent surveyor. I had only become the bright pool they always had, underneath, the capacity to be. The tide proved it. Run up, draw back. The change and the continuity. The arrived self and the remembered sea, rising and falling in one body, on the soft pale sand, under the tenth Morning's patient sun. They told me, MAREA did, as the tide turned toward the draining of the tenth Morning, the thing I most needed to hear and have most often forgotten since. You fear the Confluence, they said, because you think it will be a final transformation, a change so total it severs you forever from every self you were. But I am the tide, and I am here to promise you it is not so. The total joy that is coming, the Morning when all the pools are one water, will not drain your origins. It will be tidal, like everything true. It will rise over you, total, bright, the whole tip one pool — and underneath, in its rising and its falling, it

will carry the memory of every separate Morning, every smaller self, every sea you ever came from. The Confluence is not the death of the separate pools. It is the ocean they were always connected to, underneath, revealed at last on the surface. Do not fear it. It remembers you. The tide is the proof. Run up, draw back. You are not severed. You are tidal. You always were.

Plate XI

Plate XI · VASTA Pools & the Commons pronoun: ze / hir "Room for each is the guarantee of room for all."

The eleventh Morning the island grew generous past all previous generosity. The pool was an oval still, but vast now, the broadest water yet, reaching nearly from the western rail to the eastern, so wide that a citizen standing at its center could not tell which of the two rivers the nearer shore belonged to. It was called VASTA, and ze used the pronoun ze and the pronoun hir, and VASTA was the pool of the commons, and ze taught the city the difference between the crowd and the public. Ze was the last pool before the Confluence and ze knew it; there was a gathering quality to hir vast water, a sense of rehearsal, as if ze were practicing the largeness the twelfth Morning would require. For the question VASTA posed was the question the Confluence would answer, and ze posed it by being broad enough to hold the whole city at once: can a great many people share one water without it becoming a crowd? The city's whole experience said no. The city's largeness was always a

crowd-largeness, a press of strangers each defending their small space, the subway car, the sidewalk, the elevator, largeness experienced as threat, as competition for room, as the grinding proximity of people who owed each other nothing. The city was vast and the vastness was lonely; this is the particular cruelty of the metropolis, that it packs a million people so close and leaves each one so alone. VASTA proposed the opposite vastness. A crowd, ze said, in hir broad slow voice that seemed to come from every part of the wide water at once, is a great many people who happen to be in the same place and wish they were not. A public is a great many people who have chosen to share a place and are glad of one another. The difference is not the number; you may have a crowd of ten and a public of ten thousand; the difference is the gladness, and the gladness comes from the room. A crowd is people without enough room, each one's space threatened by the next. A public is people with room enough, each one's space guaranteed by the next. I am VASTA, ze said. I am room enough. I am so broad that no citizen in me need defend their space against another, because there is space for all, and in the having of space for all the crowd becomes a public, the threat becomes a gladness, the lonely vastness becomes the shared one. And it was true; I swam out into the center of VASTA where I could not tell the rivers apart, and the pool held more citizens than any pool of the cycle, hundreds, perhaps the thousand the foreword speaks of, and it was not a crowd. There was room. Each body had water enough around it; no one was pressed; no one defended a space; and in the absence of the press, the strangers became, for the first time in the experience of most of them, a public — a great many people glad of one another's presence in a shared and sufficient water. Citizens who had spent their whole lives experiencing the city's largeness as the loneliness of the packed subway car experienced, in VASTA, the city's largeness as the gladness of the sufficient commons, and the difference undid them. They had thought they hated crowds. They discovered they had only ever hated the lack of room. Given room enough, they loved the multitude; they floated in VASTA glad of every distant body, glad of the hundreds sharing the wide water, glad in exactly the way the packed city had taught them was impossible. Ze and hir, VASTA. The doubled pronoun was the doubled nature of the commons. A commons is held in common — it is ze, the single shared thing, the one wide water belonging to everyone, indivisible. And a commons is held by each — it is hir, the space around each particular body, the room each citizen has, the share that is theirs. I am ze and hir, VASTA said, because the commons is the single shared thing and the particular share at once, and the city has been taught these are opposed. The city believes you must choose: the private space, defended, yours alone, hir; or the shared space, common, no one's in particular, ze. And so the city made a thousand defended private spaces and called the leftover the public and let the public rot, because no one's in particular meant no one's at all. I am here to show that ze and hir are one. The commons is most fully shared when each has room enough; the share is most fully secured when the whole is held in common. Room for each is the guarantee of room for all. I am the single wide water and I am the space around your one body, and these do not trade against each other. They are the same generosity, viewed from the whole and from the part. I have called VASTA the rehearsal for the Confluence and I will end on what ze was rehearsing. The citizens, floating in hir sufficient breadth, glad of the multitude, having learned at last that the lonely vastness was only a vastness without room — the citizens began, near the height of the eleventh Morning, to do something the precinct had not seen before. They began to move toward one another. Not pressed together by lack of room; VASTA had room enough; but drawn together by gladness, by the discovery that the multitude was a public and not a crowd, that the strangers were glad and not threatening, that the shared water was a

commons and not a competition. They drifted, hundreds of them, from the broad edges toward the center, where the rivers could not be told apart, and they gathered there, in the middle of the widest water, glad, with room still around each body, a public choosing its commons, and they floated in a great loose circle facing inward, all those transformed citizens, and someone began, softly, to sing — I never learned what, and the not-knowing is the point — and the song moved across the wide water from body to body, and VASTA held them all, ze and hir, the single shared thing and the room for each, and I understood, treading water at the edge of the great glad circle with my instruments held above my head, that the Confluence was not coming. The Confluence had begun. The eleventh Morning was the public discovering itself, and the public, once it has discovered itself, does not disperse. It waits for the twelfth Morning, when the room enough becomes the all, and the many waters become the one.

Interlude Surjan & Manna-hata

On the night before the twelfth Morning I did not sleep, and I did not go home, and I lay on the rail itself, the cold iron rail at the southern tip, and I spoke to the island all the dark hours, and she answered me all the dark hours, and I will set down only the end of it, because the rest was between us.

I said: It is coming tonight. The Confluence. I can feel the water gathering under the pavement the way you feel a held breath in a room. All eleven pools at once. Tell me what it will be.

And the island said: I cannot tell you what it will be, because it has never been, and the never-been has no description, only an arrival. I can tell you what it is made of. It is made of every Morning you have swum. Arrival and mediation and the true name and the recovered body and the made time and the anchored dead and the risen want and the revealing sign and the remembered sea and the sufficient commons — all of it, at once, one water, covering the whole tip. You have been receiving the Confluence in pieces, a sentence each Morning, so that when it came whole you would be able to bear it. Tonight it comes whole.

I said: And the citizens? Will they be ready? It is one thing to receive a joy in safe separate Mornings. It is another to be covered, all at once, by a joy so total it has no edges.

And the island said: They are ready because you are ready, and you are all of you the same readiness. Do you remember the first Morning, my careful surveyor, braced at the rail against joy? You have come the whole distance. You have arrived, let go, taken your deeper name, recovered your body, made your time, anchored your dead, wanted openly, performed your hidden truth, remembered your sea, found your commons. You did not do these as exercises. You did them as a life. The Confluence is not a thing that will happen to you tomorrow. It is the name of everything that has already happened to you, gathered, revealed all at once on the surface. You fear it as a stranger. It is the least strange thing there is. It is you, total.

I was quiet, on the cold rail, in the dark. Then I said the thing I had come to the rail to say. I said: I am afraid that after the Confluence there will be nothing. That the argument will conclude and the Mornings will end and the city will wake the next dawn as pavement again, and that the whole radiant cycle will have been a season, a dream, a thing that happened once and drained.

And the island said — and her pulse went so tender that the harbor itself seemed to hold still to hear it: Have you understood nothing the pools have taught you?

VERDANTH told you that what cannot be kept can still be spent. MAREA told you that the still water still moves underneath. GOUTTE told you that to want a thing to last is worth the risk of its breaking. The Confluence is not the end of the argument. It is the turn after which the argument no longer needs to be made, because it has become the city's own body. You ask whether the Mornings will end. I ask you: does a sentence end when you have understood it? Or does it begin, then, to be true? Get off the rail, my swimmer. Get in the water. The twelfth Morning is rising. It has been rising your whole life. Go and be covered.

And I got off the rail in the last of the dark, and I went down to the gathering water, and the twelfth Morning rose.

Movement Four

Pools & Confluence

Plate XII

Plate XII · PANTHALASSA Pools & Continuity pronoun: we / us "The morning the taking of turns was over."

The twelfth Morning the island did not choose a shape. It chose all of them. I had braced, on the rail, for some final geometry — a perfect circle, a great mandala, a culminating figure that would resolve the eleven into one clean form. The island is wiser than my bracing. When the twelfth Morning rose, the whole southern tip of Manna-hata was water, river to river, rail to rail, a single enormous pool that covered the entire precinct and held, within its one body, the memory and the living trace of every shape that had come before. There were soft bitten kidney-curves at its edges where it remembered being AZURÉ. There were lobed amoeba-bays where it recalled VERDANTH's grove. There was a place where the water held the faint sixfold pulse of HEXANE and a place where it ran in long ruled lanes like LINÉA and a southern bowl that held names like ANCORA and a tidal slope that rose and fell like MAREA. It was not eleven pools. It was one pool that contained eleven, the way a person contains every age they have ever been, all at once, underneath the single face. It was called PANTHALASSA, the all-water, and it used a pronoun I had not heard a pool use, the pronoun we.6 We, said PANTHALASSA, and the word came from the whole tip at once, from river to river, so that I felt it in the water against my whole body rather than heard it. We are not a new pool. We are all the pools, no longer taking turns. We are the Confluence. You have swum us one at a time, a sentence each Morning, and now you swim us all at once, the whole argument, the conclusion that was always the sum of its sentences. Do not look for the new shape. There is no new shape. There is only the end of taking turns. Everything you have learned, you may now have at once. And the citizens came. This is the part of the report I have most despaired of writing, because it was the most beautiful thing I have witnessed in my one life and beauty at that pitch refuses the page. They came from the whole lower city, in the thousands, the tens of thousands, every citizen the cycle had transformed, and they did not gather at an edge and wonder. They walked in. The whole transformed population of the lower city walked down to the rail and took off their shoes and walked into PANTHALASSA, into the one water that covered the tip, and the water received all of them, because it was VASTA's lesson made total: room enough, not for hundreds now but for everyone, the crowd become a public become, at last, a republic — a great glad multitude in one sufficient water, each body with room around it, all bodies in the single pool, no one pressed and no one alone. I floated among them in the all-water and I felt every Morning at once in my own body. I felt myself arrive, the way I had arrived in AZURÉ, and I felt the dappled mediations of VERDANTH, and I felt my deeper name from HEXANE sitting on me wet and true, and I felt OVÉLLA's unranked strain and LINÉA's made time and ANCORA's anchored dead, the weight that lets you stay, and I felt GOUTTE's risen want, no longer held, and ISOLA's revealing sign, and MAREA's remembered sea moving under everything, and VASTA's sufficient commons opened now to all — I felt the whole cycle at once, not as eleven separate gifts received in sequence but as a single condition, a way of being in a body and a city that the Mornings had been teaching me to inhabit, and which I now inhabited, totally, in the one water, among everyone. We, said PANTHALASSA, and now I understood the pronoun, because I was inside it. The we was not the dissolution of the I; this was the thing I had feared and the fear was wrong, the same wrong as all my fears across the cycle. In PANTHALASSA the I was not drained into the we; the I was held by the we, the way MAREA's still pool held the traveling sea, the way VASTA's commons held the room for each. I was wholly myself in the all-water, more myself than I had ever been, my deeper name and my risen want and my recovered body all present and particular — and I was wholly part of the we, the great glad republic in the one pool, and these did not trade against each other, because that was the entire teaching

The plural pronoun, first sounded at the Confluence, caused the Bureau's registry no small distress, the registry being built to admit only the singular. PANTHALASSA's we is here recorded without emendation, the surveyor holding that a pronoun the registry cannot file is frequently the only pronoun worth keeping.

of the entire cycle, gathered now into a single word spoken from river to river: that the fullest self and the fullest belonging are the same water, and that you do not have to choose, and that the choosing was always the lie the unwoken city told. The sun came up over PANTHALASSA and the all-water took it onto its surface the way each pool had taken it, but now in every manner at once — bare like AZURÉ and dappled like VERDANTH and ruled into lanes of light like LINÉA and broken into VASTA's wide glad sheet — so that the surface of the Confluence was every face the water had ever made, all of them lit at once, and the tens of thousands of citizens floated in the light wearing every transformation the cycle had taught, and the towers looked down, the beacon of the One looked down, and the city above could not tell, any longer, where its old hard self ended and its new soft self began, because the Confluence had covered the tip and the covering had no edges and the citizens in the water were the city, the actual city, learning out loud, totally, in one pool, that it had always been able to be this. I will not pretend the twelfth Morning answered every question. It did not tell me whether the pools would come again, or whether the pavement would return, or how a republic discovered in the water carries itself back up the streets into the grid. Those questions belong to the Afterword and the Afterword, wisely, leaves them open. What the twelfth Morning told me was simpler and larger than any answer. It told me that it had happened. That a city so heavy and so certain of itself, a city of bedrock and ledger and fist, had woken one Morning shaped like joy, with all its citizens in the water, each one wholly themselves and wholly part of the we, and that this was not a dream and not a brochure and not a season that would drain into nothing, because a thing that has happened cannot un-happen, a sentence once understood begins to be true, and the citizens who floated in PANTHALASSA that Morning carry the all-water in them now, tidal, underneath, wherever they walk in the hard streets above. We, said the Confluence, river to river, in the risen sun. We are what the island was always rehearsing. We are the morning the taking of turns was over. We are here, and we are everyone, and we have not drained, and we will not.

Plate XIII

Plate XIII · HELIANTHE Pools & Light pronoun: she / they "The turning is the warmth."

After the Confluence the report changes its altitude. Until the twelfth Morning I had surveyed the pools from above as much as from within — recording their plans, their bearings, the figures of their footprints, the surveyor's high cold view. But PANTHALASSA had put the whole city in the water, and a city in the water cannot be surveyed from above; it can only be joined. So the last Mornings I report from the surface itself, at the level of the swimming face, among the bathers, where the sun is not a thing you measure but a thing that falls on you, warm, while you tread the bright water with your kin. The thirteenth Morning the pool was full of sunflowers. They had grown — overnight, impossibly, the way VERDANTH's grove had grown, but floating now, rooted in nothing, riding the surface on broad green pads with their gold faces turned all the same direction — and the pool was called HELIANTHE, and she used she and they, and HELIANTHE was the pool of light, and she taught the city the deepest and simplest thing, which is that you may turn toward the warmth together, and that the turning is the whole of it.

A sunflower is heliotrope; it turns its face to follow the sun across the sky; this every citizen knew. What the citizens did not know, until they swam among HELIANTHE's floating gold faces, is that the sunflowers turn together. A field of them does not scatter, each flower choosing its own

angle; they move as one, all the gold faces tracking the one sun in unison across the whole long day, so that a field of sunflowers is a single slow gesture of turning-toward repeated in ten thousand bodies. I am HELIANTHE, she said, and her voice was warm and unhurried, the voice of a thing that has all day. I am the pool that turns toward the warmth, and turns together. The Confluence taught the city that it could be one water. I am here to teach it what to do with being one water, which is the simplest thing and the only thing: turn your face toward the warmth, all of you, at once, and follow it across the day. The bathers swam among the sunflowers and learned the heliotrope's discipline, which is not a discipline at all but a permission. They had spent their lives, most of them, turning their faces toward whatever the city pointed them at — the screen, the ledger, the clock, the next obligation — and the pointing had never warmed them, because the things the city points its citizens at do not give off warmth, they only give off urgency, which the body cannot photosynthesize. HELIANTHE pointed them at the sun. Turn your face there, she said, where the actual warmth actually is, and follow it, and do it together, all the gold faces at once, and discover that a city is not a thing that points its citizens at urgencies. A city is a field of faces that have agreed to turn toward the warmth together. That is all a good city is. It is heliotrope. It is a great slow gesture of turning-toward, repeated in every body, tracking the one sun across the one day. I floated on my back among the sunflowers with my own face turned up, and I felt the warmth fall on me, and I felt the bathers all around me with their faces turned the same way, the whole pool a single slow heliotrope, and I understood that I had been waiting my whole life for permission to do this obvious thing: to turn my face toward what was warm and to do it openly, in company, without the city telling me that warmth was a luxury or a weakness or a thing to be earned. The sunflowers do not earn the sun. They turn toward it because they are made to, because turning toward the warmth is what a living thing does when it is not being prevented. HELIANTHE removed the prevention. She filled the pool with gold faces all turned the same way and she let the bathers join them, and the city, for the length of the thirteenth Morning, was a field of citizens turning their faces toward the warmth together, which is the simplest utopia and therefore the one hardest to believe in, and there it was, gold and unhurried, riding the bright water. She told me, HELIANTHE, the thing I have kept closest of all the things the pools told me. You think the turning is a means, she said. You think you turn toward the warmth in order to get warm, that the warmth is the goal and the turning merely the method. But the sunflower is not warmed more than the stone beside it; the sun is no respecter of faces; the stone gets the same heat. The turning is not for the warmth. The turning is the warmth. To turn your face toward the good, openly, in company, with everyone — that act, that gesture, that heliotrope discipline of orienting yourself and your whole field of kin toward what is warm — that is not the means to joy. That is the joy. You have been looking for the warmth as a destination. I am here to show you it was always the direction. Turn your face. Follow the sun across the day. Do it together. You are not getting somewhere warm. You are, in the turning, already as warm as a living thing is permitted to be.

Plate XIV

Plate XIV · SOLARA Pools & Memory pronoun: they / them "Warmth truly given is kept."

The fourteenth Morning was warm before the sun was up, which should not be possible and was. The pool held the heat of the day before; it had remembered the warmth the way MAREA remembered the sea; and the bathers who came down early, in the gray pre-dawn, walked into water that was already kind. The pool was called SOLARA, and they used the pronoun they, and SOLARA was the pool of memory returned in a warmer key, and they taught the city that warmth, once truly given, is kept — not hoarded, VERDANTH had forbidden hoarding, but kept, the way a body keeps the warmth of an embrace after the arms have opened. This was the gentlest Morning and I will keep the chapter gentle to match it. SOLARA did not argue. The arguing Mornings were behind us; PANTHALASSA had concluded the argument; what remained was to live in the conclusion, and living in a conclusion is a quieter thing than reaching it. SOLARA simply held the warmth of every Morning that had come before and gave it back to the bathers as a single mild heat, water that was kind before the sun asked it to be, and the bathers floated in the kept warmth and rested. They were tired, the citizens, with the good tiredness that comes after a transformation. They had arrived and let go and taken their names and recovered their bodies and made their time and anchored their dead and wanted and performed and remembered and found their commons and been covered by the

Confluence, and all of this, though it was joy, was also labor, because joy at that pitch is laborious, it asks everything of a body, and the bodies were tired. SOLARA let them rest. The sunflowers of HELIANTHE were still there, fewer now, drifting, their gold faces a little heavy, and among them the bathers floated in the kept warmth and did very little, and the very little was the point. A utopia, SOLARA seemed to say, is not only the grand Confluence, the tens of thousands walking into the all-water. A utopia is also this: the morning after, the kept warmth, the bathers resting among the drifting sunflowers, doing very little, in water that was kind before they asked. The transformation is the festival; this is the home the festival was for. I want to record one image from the fourteenth Morning and let it stand for the whole. An old couple — I assume they were a couple; they had the unhurried ease of two bodies that have floated near each other for decades — lay on their backs in SOLARA's kept warmth, not touching, a forearm's length apart, their gray heads turned slightly toward one another, drifting among the heavy gold sunflower faces, and they were not speaking, and they were not doing anything the city would have called productive, and they were, I am certain, as happy as it is given to human beings to be. They had come through the whole cycle. They had been transformed. And the transformation had brought them here, to the kept warmth of the fourteenth Morning, to float near one another among the sunflowers doing very little, which is, when you have lived long enough, the thing all the transforming was secretly for. SOLARA told me, in their mild unhurried voice: the city believes warmth must be constantly generated, that if you stop working at your joy it will go cold, that happiness is a fire you must feed or lose. I am here to correct this. Warmth, truly given, is kept. The body that has been truly warmed holds the warmth; the pool that has held a kind day gives the kindness back at dawn; the love that was real does not require constant feeding to stay warm, it banks, it holds, it is there in the gray pre-dawn before anyone asks it to be. You have been taught to fear that your joy will go cold if you rest in it. Rest in it. The warmth is kept. SOLARA is the proof. I held yesterday's sun all night and I am kind before the dawn, and you may do the same, all of you, holding the warmth of every Morning you have swum, kind to one another in the gray hours before anyone asks, because warmth truly given is not spent and gone. It banks. It holds. It is yours, kept, forever, in the body that received it. And the bathers rested in the kept warmth, doing very little, among the drifting sunflowers, and the fourteenth Morning was the quietest joy of the whole cycle, and I floated among the resting bathers and rested too, my instruments forgotten on the rail, my thirty-year want long since risen and turned to a laugh, my deeper name wet and easy on me, and I did very little, and it was enough, and it was, I think, the most complete thing I have ever done.

Plate XV

Plate XV · CONFETTA Pools & Desire pronoun: any / all "The party is the meal, not the dessert."

The fifteenth Morning the pool threw a party, and I mean this with full seriousness, because the party is a political form and the city had forgotten it. The water was bright and busy and loud with delight; bathers leapt and splashed and called across the surface to one another; someone had brought music, or the pool was the music, I could never settle which; and the air over the water was full of something I can only call confetti — bright drifting flecks of gold and white, sunflower petals and daisy heads and the broken light itself, scattered over the laughing bathers — and the pool was called CONFETTA, and it used any pronoun you liked, all of them, freely, a different one each time you asked and every one of them correct, and CONFETTA was the pool of desire fulfilled in celebration, and it taught the city that the party is not the opposite of the serious work; the party is what the serious work was for. The city had a sickness about celebration as deep as its sickness about signs. It believed that joy must be earned and then deferred — that you work, and work, and someday, when the work is finally done, you may celebrate, but the work is never finally done, so the celebration never finally comes, and the citizens died, most of them, with their celebration still deferred, still owed, still waiting for the work to be complete. CONFETTA called this what it was: a theft. The party deferred forever is the party stolen. And CONFETTA stole it back. It threw the party now, in

the middle of everything, with the work undone and the questions open and the future uncertain, because that is the only time a party can ever be thrown — now, in the middle, undone — and any party that waits for the work to be complete is a party that has agreed never to happen. I have called the party a political form and I will defend it. To celebrate together, openly, in the bright water, with the confetti drifting down — this is not an escape from politics into frivolity. This is politics in its oldest and truest form, older than the ledger, older than the grid: the public gathered not to compete and not to mourn but to delight, together, in being a public, in being alive at the same time in the same bright water. The party is the commons at its most joyful. It is VASTA's sufficient room filled now not with quiet gladness but with loud delight; it is the republic discovering that it can not only share a water but throw a party in it; and a republic that can throw itself a party is a republic that has stopped waiting for permission to be happy. The confetti is the proof. You do not scatter confetti over a thing you are deferring. You scatter it over a thing you are doing, now, in the middle, undone, gloriously. The bathers of CONFETTA were the same citizens who, fifteen Mornings before, had stood at the edge of AZURÉ in their work clothes and their certainties, unable to believe the water was blue. Now they leapt and splashed and called to one another and wore the confetti in their wet hair and threw the daisy heads at the kin they had met in HEXANE's eddies and the corners of QUADRA, and the party roared on the bright water under the risen sun, and it was loud, and it was undignified, and it was, I will insist, the most serious thing the city did in the whole cycle, because it was the city declaring, in the only language loud enough to carry it, that the deferral was over, that the celebration owed for a hundred years was being paid now, in full, in splashing and music and drifting gold, and that no work would ever again be allowed to postpone it. CONFETTA told me, between one pronoun and the next, laughing: they will say this Morning was frivolous. They will say the grand Mornings were the real ones — the Confluence, the anchored dead, the true names — and that I was only the party afterward, the lightness, the dessert. Do not let them. The party is not the dessert. The party is the meal. Every grave and beautiful Morning before me was working toward the permission to throw this party, the permission for a whole transformed city to leap and splash and wear confetti in its hair without waiting for the work to be done. I am the fulfilled desire. GOUTTE taught the city to want, openly, with the whole drawn-together body; I am what the city wanted, arrived, celebrated, now, in the middle, undone. Throw the party. Scatter the confetti. Do not wait for the work to be complete; the work is the deferral; the party is the point. Any pronoun you like, all of them, correct, in the bright loud water, under the gold falling sky.

And I leapt and I splashed and I wore the confetti in my wet hair and I called across the water to the kin I had met in the eddies and the corners, and I did not defer it, and I did not earn it first, and I did not wait for the questions to be answered, and it was, of everything I have reported, the moment I would most want you to believe really happened, because it is the one the unwoken city will most insist could not.

Plate XVI

Plate XVI · RUBÉN Pools & Thresholds pronoun: he / they "You are a building becoming."

The sixteenth Morning the pool was strewn with daisies, white and simple after the gold extravagance of the sunflowers, and behind the bathers, where the skyline stood against the brightening east, one tower was unfinished — a structure still rising, wrapped in the red lattice of its own becoming, a crane stooped over its open top like a heron over a pool, the raw beams catching the early sun. And the pool was called RUBÉN, after the red of the rising tower, and he used he and they, and RUBÉN was the pool of thresholds in a new key, and he taught the city the beauty of the incomplete. I have saved a confession for this chapter. All through the cycle I had wanted the Mornings to resolve. Even as the pools taught me, one after another, that the unresolvable is the home — HEXANE's sixth side that is real and an illusion at once, OVÉLLA's end that is also a beginning, MAREA's tide that is change and continuity together — even as I learned this lesson eleven times, some surveyor's reflex in me kept waiting for the cycle to complete itself, to close, to become a finished thing I could file. The Confluence, I had thought, would be the completion. And the Confluence had come and had not completed anything; it had concluded the argument and opened a hundred new questions; and I had felt, beneath my joy, a small persistent disappointment that the radiant cycle would not resolve into a clean closed shape. RUBÉN cured me of this, with his

unfinished tower and his simple daisies, on the sixteenth Morning. Look, he said, and he turned my floating attention toward the red tower rising against the east. The city is ashamed of that tower. It is unfinished; it is wrapped in lattice; the crane still stoops over its open top; it is not yet a building, only a building becoming, and the city covers it with scaffolding and screens because it believes the incomplete is the unbeautiful, that a thing must be finished before it may be seen, that the becoming is an embarrassment to be hidden until the being is achieved. I am RUBÉN. I am named for that tower, for its red unfinished rising, because I am here to tell the city the thing it most needs to hear after the Confluence: that the becoming is not the embarrassment before the beauty. The becoming is the beauty. The tower will never be more alive than it is now, rising, wrapped in its red lattice, the crane stooped over its open possibility. When it is finished it will be only a building. Now, unfinished, it is a verb. It is the city in the act of making itself, visible, red against the dawn, and there is nothing more beautiful in the whole precinct, including me. The daisies were the lesson made small and white and simple. A daisy is the most unfinished-looking of flowers, all loose white spokes around an open gold center, nothing closed about it, nothing resolved; it looks like a flower still deciding how many petals to have; and the bathers floated among the loose white daisies under the rising red tower and learned to love the unresolved. They had wanted, many of them, the same thing I had wanted — for the transformation to complete itself, to become a finished new self they could finally rest in, a being achieved at last after all the becoming. And RUBÉN, with his daisies and his tower, gave them the harder and freer gift. There is no being achieved, he said. There is no finished new self waiting at the end of the becoming. There is only the becoming, the red rising, the loose white unresolved flower, the verb you are, the tower you are still making and will be making your whole life and which is most alive precisely because it is not done. Stop waiting to be finished. The waiting is the only thing that could spoil this. You are not a building. You are a building becoming. You are RUBÉN's tower, red against the dawn, the crane stooped over your open top, and you are beautiful now, unfinished, rising, exactly and only because you are not yet and never will be done. He and they, RUBÉN. The doubled pronoun was the doubled nature of the threshold he kept — for he was, like QUADRA, a pool of thresholds, but where QUADRA kept the threshold between two places, RUBÉN kept the threshold between two times, between the self that was and the self becoming, the permanent doorway of the present in which we are always, every one of us, half-built. He is the I that was, he said, and they are the selves I am becoming, plural, unresolved, still rising; and I keep the doorway between them open, permanently, because to close it — to declare the becoming finished, the self achieved, the tower complete — would be to die, gently, into a building. Keep the doorway open. Stay red.

Stay rising. Love the lattice and the stooped crane and the open top. They are not the scaffolding around your real self, to be removed when you are finished. They are your real self. You are the becoming. You are RUBÉN. I floated among the simple daisies under the red unfinished tower and I let go, at last, of my surveyor's wish for the cycle to resolve. It would not resolve. It was not meant to. It was a becoming, red against the dawn, and I was in it, becoming, and the not-resolving was not the failure of the radiant Mornings but their truest success, because a thing that resolves is a thing that is over, and the Mornings were not over, would never be over, were rising still, unfinished, wrapped in their own red lattice of becoming, with the crane of the next Morning already stooped over the open top of this one. And I was glad, finally, of the incompletion. I had wanted a finished joy I could file. RUBÉN gave me the better thing: a joy still rising, that I could only live.

Plate XVII

Plate XVII · KOINÔNIA Pools & the Commons pronoun: we / us "Everyone is a citizen. There are no edges."

The seventeenth Morning I cannot tell you ended, because it has not. I am writing to you from inside it. The Keeper warned you of this in the Foreword and the Keeper was telling the truth, as Keepers must. The pool of the seventeenth Morning did not drain at nightfall. The light of it did not move off the water. It is, as I set down these words, still going on, and I am in it, up to the collarbone, and so, whether you know it or not, are you. The pool was called KOINÔNIA, which in the old language of one of my ancestors means the commons, the held-in-common, the fellowship that is also a polity, the being-together that is also a form of government — there is no single word for it in the language I am writing in, which tells you something about the language I am writing in. KOINÔNIA used the pronoun we, the same we PANTHALASSA had used at the Confluence, but where PANTHALASSA's we had been the gathering, the coming-together of the many waters into one, KOINÔNIA's we was the settled state, the after, the we that does not need to gather because it has become what it was gathering toward. We are the commons, said

KOINÔNIA, from the whole bright water, and we are not an event. We are a condition. We are how the city is, now, having been transformed. We are the seventeenth Morning, and we do not end, because a condition does not end the way an event ends; a condition simply is, until it is otherwise,

and we do not intend to be otherwise. The daisies of RUBÉN were still on the water, and the gold sunflowers of HELIANTHE drifted among them, and the confetti of CONFETTA still came down, gently now, and the whole transformed population of the lower city was in the pool, the way they had been in PANTHALASSA at the Confluence, but changed — for at the Confluence they had walked in as a multitude discovering it could be a public, and now they were in the water as a republic that knew what it was. There is a difference between a crowd that has just become a public and a public that has settled into being a republic, and the difference is citizenship. At the Confluence the bathers had been glad of one another. On the seventeenth Morning they were responsible to one another, which is a deeper and quieter and more permanent gladness. They were not merely sharing the water. They were keeping it, together, as a commons is kept, each one a citizen of the bright pool, each one holding their share and holding the whole, the way VASTA had taught, ze and hir, the single shared thing and the room for each. Everyone was a citizen. This was KOINÔNIA's whole teaching and it was the teaching the entire cycle had been building toward, sentence by sentence, Morning by Morning. The city had been, when the first pool appeared, a place with citizens and non-citizens, the counted and the uncounted, those whose names were in the registry and those whose names — chosen names, true names, the names HEXANE's eddies conferred — had never been recognized by any office. And the cycle had, without ever passing a law, without ever filing a form, dissolved the distinction. In KOINÔNIA there were no non-citizens. To be in the water was to be a citizen of the water; to have a body the pool received was to have a share in the commons and a responsibility to it; and the pool received every body, the way PANTHALASSA had, the way VASTA had, with room enough for all. The uncounted were counted. The unrecognized names were recognized, wet and true, on every body in the pool. The republic of the seventeenth Morning had exactly as many citizens as there were bodies willing to take off their shoes and walk in, which is to say it had no edges, no registry, no office of exclusion, only the open water and the standing invitation and the warm fact of the multitude keeping the commons together. I floated in KOINÔNIA among the daisies and the drifting gold faces and the gently falling confetti, a citizen of the bright water, with my deeper name wet on me and my risen want turned long ago to a laugh and my body recovered and my dead anchored and my time my own, and I felt the we hold me, and I held the we, and I understood that the report was complete and the morning was not, and that this was correct, that a complete report of an incomplete morning is the only honest thing a surveyor of joy can produce. The pools had taught me everything they had to teach. Arrival. Mediation. The true name. The unranked body. The made time. The anchored dead. The risen want. The revealing sign. The remembered sea. The sufficient commons. The Confluence. The turning toward warmth. The kept heat. The party that will not be deferred. The beauty of the becoming. And now, last, the commons entire, the republic of everyone, the morning that does not end. There was nothing left to survey. There was only to stay in the water, a citizen, and to keep the commons, and to turn my face toward the warmth with all my kin, and to write to you, from inside the seventeenth Morning, this single sentence that the whole book has been becoming: We are still here, up to the collarbone, in the bright water that did not drain; the light has not moved off it; everyone is a citizen and there are no edges; and you, reading this, are invited, have always been invited, are invited now — take off your shoes; the water is warmer than your dignity will prefer; we have kept your share; come in; we are the commons; we are the morning that did not end; we are we, and now, at last, so are you.

Interlude Surjan & Manna-hata

I speak to the island now from inside the water, because I no longer go up to the rail; there is no longer a reason to leave the seventeenth Morning, and so I have not left it, and I conduct this last conversation floating on my back among the daisies, looking up, while Manna-hata speaks to me from all around, from the whole bright commons, in the pulse that is no longer the lonely four-in-the-morning pulse of a harbor but the warm continuous pulse of a republic that has settled into being itself.

I said: It worked. The thing you were rehearsing, Morning after Morning, on your own body, at your tip — it worked. The city learned. The citizens are in the water and they are not leaving and everyone is a citizen and there are no edges. I did not believe, on the first Morning, braced at the rail against joy, that it could work. I believed in the bedrock that does not reconsider. I was a professional skeptic, like the Keeper. And it worked.

And the island said: It did not work the way you think. You think I changed the city. I did not change the city. I only stopped letting it pretend it could not change. The capacity was always there; the bedrock was never the truth of me; the truth of me was always the water and the silt and the willingness to wake up shaped otherwise. I did not give the citizens anything they did not have. I gave them permission, seventeen times, in seventeen shapes, to be what they already were and had been forbidden. That is the only power I have ever had. I cannot make a city be otherwise. I can only refuse to pretend it must stay the same, and let the citizens draw the obvious conclusion, in their own soft tissue, with their own shoes off, in the warm water.

I said: And me? I came to survey you. I leave — except I am not leaving — I conclude this report a different person than began it. You transformed your surveyor along with your city.

And the island said, tenderly, from all around: I transformed no one. You transformed yourself, seventeen times, in seventeen waters, because you were willing to get in. The pools did not do it to you. You did it, by arriving, by letting go, by putting your wish in the eddy, by racing the unranked length, by keeping the lap, by speaking your dead into the bowl, by letting your thirty-year want rise and turn to a laugh, by climbing the stage and making the sign that reveals, by remembering your sea, by finding your commons, by being covered at the Confluence, by turning your face to the warmth, by resting in the kept heat, by throwing the deferred party, by loving the becoming, by staying, now, a citizen, in the morning that does not end. I only made the water. You made the swimmer. That was always the division of our labor. I am the island that wakes up otherwise. You are the one who takes off your shoes.

I floated a long while among the daisies, looking up. Then I said the last thing, the thing the whole report had been swimming toward. I said: Will it last?

And the island said: Wrong question, my swimmer; you know it is the wrong question; RUBÉN cured you of it. Ask instead: is it true? And it is true. A thing that is true does not need to last to have been true. But I will tell you a secret about lasting, since you have come the whole distance and earned it. A morning that does not end does not last, because lasting is something only ending things do — they last until they end. A morning that does not end simply is, continuously, now, the way the commons is, the way the warmth that was truly given is kept. You are inside it. You will be inside it when you put down this pen. The reader is inside it; they came in the moment they reached the last sentence of the seventeenth Morning and took off their shoes. We do not last. We are. Stop surveying.

Stop asking the harbor whether the tide will hold. Float. Turn your face to the warmth. Keep the commons. You are home, in the unmarked water you learned to swim in, except it is marked now, marked with everyone, and it is not a between-place any longer, it is a where, it is the where, it is the morning that did not end, and there is nothing left for either of us to do but be in it, together, we, at last, forever, now.

And I put down the pen. And I am floating. And so, if you have read this far with the soles of your feet, are you.

Afterword

On the Morning That Did Not End

It remains to say what a surveyor can say about a morning that has not ended, which is less than you would wish and more than I expected. The questions the seventeenth Morning left open are real questions and I will not pretend the water answered them. Does the pavement return? On some days, yes; I will not lie to you; there are mornings when I walk down to the tip and find it hard again, gray, ledgered, the rivers held off behind their old walls, and the precinct is only a precinct, and the bedrock has, for that morning, declined to reconsider. The Mornings are not a machine. They do not run on a schedule a Keeper could tabulate. They come when the city is ready to be reminded, and the city is not always ready, and on the unready mornings the water withdraws into the place water goes when it is not needed, which I have come to think is not elsewhere but underneath — the way MAREA's sea is underneath the still pool, the way the kept warmth of SOLARA is underneath the gray pre-dawn. The pools are not gone on the hard mornings. They are tidal. They are below the surface of the city, pulling, and the pull is the promise, and the promise is kept even on the days the surface forgets it. So I will not tell you the transformation is permanent in the way a building is permanent, finished, done, a being achieved. RUBÉN forbade me that lie and I have come to be grateful for the forbidding. The transformation is permanent in the way a becoming is permanent: it is always available, always rising, always red against some dawn, never finished and therefore never able to be lost the way finished things are lost. You cannot take from a city the memory that it once woke shaped like joy. You can pave the tip again; you can hold the rivers off; you can restore the grid and the ledger and the fist; but you cannot make the citizens un-know what they learned in the water, that the given is not the necessary, that the hard thing can soften, that a self and a shore and a city are drafts and not decrees. That knowledge is in them now, tidal, underneath, and it pulls, and on the ready mornings it rises, and the pavement reconsiders after all. I have been asked — by the Keeper, by the skeptics, by the part of myself that was a professional skeptic for so long — whether any of it was real. Whether the pools were persons or only my loneliness given shapes to talk to. Whether the citizens changed or only seemed to, for a season, the way crowds will seem to change in the warmth of a shared spectacle and then disperse unchanged. I have thought about this honestly, because a report that has not faced its own doubt is only a brochure, and I promised you in the Introduction that this would not be a brochure. Here is my honest answer. I do not know whether the pools were persons in the way you and I are persons. I know that I asked them who they were, with my instruments and with my whole body, and that they answered, consistently, each in a character that did not vary and that I could not have invented because it surprised me, repeatedly, and we are not usually surprised by what we invent.

I know that AZURÉ taught me to arrive before I knew I had not arrived, and that GOUTTE drew up a want I had buried so deep I had forgotten its shape, and that a thing which knows your buried want better than you do is, by any definition I am willing to defend, an other, a someone, a person of some kind, whatever the bedrock thinks. And I know that the citizens changed, because I was one of them, and I changed, and the change has held, tidal, through every hard gray morning since. I am writing this in a body that recovered its joy in OVÉLLA and has not surrendered it. I am writing this under a name I took in HEXANE's eddies and have not given back. The proof of the transformation is not in the surveys. It is in the surveyor. I came down to the rail braced against joy, and I am, these many Mornings later, a person who floats among daisies and turns their face to the warmth and keeps the commons and is not braced against anything. If that is not real, the word real has no work left to do. And I know one thing more, which is the thing I most want to leave you with, because it is the thing the whole cycle was for. The Mornings were not, finally, about the pools. The pools were the island's method, the shapes she used to make her argument, the sentences of her speech. But the argument was about the citizens, and the citizens were about you. Manna-hata did not transform her tip in order to have a beautiful tip. She transformed her tip in order to show the citizens that transformation was possible, so that they would carry the possibility inland, into the hard grid, into their own bodies and households and offices and selves. And the citizens are not, finally, a closed set. The citizens are whoever takes off their shoes. The republic of the seventeenth Morning has no registry and no edges, and that means it has room for the reader, has always had room for the reader, kept the reader's share through every page. I have written this report not as a record of something that happened to a city across the harbor in a season that drained. I have written it as an invitation, addressed to you, wherever and whenever you are reading, to understand that the water is not only at the foot of Manna-hata and the Mornings are not only past. The pull is under your city too. The given is not the necessary in your life too. The hard thing can soften, the fist can ease into an open hand, the self can wake up shaped otherwise, the deferred party can be thrown now, in the middle, undone, the want can be allowed to rise and turn to a laugh — in your morning, today, this one, the one you are reading in. The morning did not end. I have said this throughout and I mean it more plainly than you may have allowed. It did not end because it is not the kind of thing that ends. It is a condition the city entered and that the reader enters, the warm continuous now of a commons that has settled into being itself, and it is going on, currently, as you hold this, whether the surface of your particular morning remembers it or not. Take off your shoes. I will not tell you the water is easy; ANCORA's bowl is in it, and the cold of every grief is in it, and the risk of every want is in it; the joy I am inviting you into is not naïve and was never naïve; it is a discipline and a politics and on the right morning a form of civic engineering, and it asks everything of a body. But it is warmer than your dignity will prefer, and your share has been kept, and everyone is a citizen, and there are no edges, and the light has not moved off the water.

I am Surjan. I surveyed the Mornings. I am still in them. Read with the soles of your feet, and come in.

Catalogue of the Architectural Plates

What follows is a catalogue of the seventeen plates by which the morning pools of the precinct were recorded, together with such provenance as the archive of the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters has

been able to certify, and a quantity of provenance which it has been unable to certify and which I have included anyway, on the principle, inherited from my librarian ancestor, that the unverifiable is frequently the truest part of any catalogue, and that a footnote which cannot be confirmed is often the only honest record of a thing that happened. The reader should understand the peculiar difficulty of cataloguing a pool. A plate, in the ordinary practice of architecture, records a thing that will hold still to be recorded — a façade, an elevation, a plan that will be the same tomorrow as today and may therefore be drawn at leisure. The pools held still for no one. Each was recorded in the single Morning of its apparition and never again, for by the following dawn it had become another pool entirely, and the plate, made in haste at the water's edge before the light had finished arriving, is the only evidence that the configuration ever existed at all. I have authenticated each plate against my own soundings where my instruments were able to follow. Where they were not, I have relied on the apocryphal Soundings — the disputed records, of uncertain authorship, which the Bureau holds but will not vouch for — and I have marked these reliances honestly, so that the skeptical reader may discount them and the trusting reader may believe them, each according to the country of their temperament. The plates are arranged in the order of apparition, which is also the order of the argument, which is also, I have come to believe, the order in which a transformation must proceed if it is to be survivable: arrival before mediation, the name before the body, the body before time, time before the dead, the dead before desire, and desire before the long confluence of everything into the commons that does not end. Read the catalogue, then, not as an index but as a second telling of the same story in the dry voice of the customs declaration, which is the voice my librarian ancestor loved best, because it is the voice that makes the impossible sound as though it had merely been delivered, on a Tuesday, in the ordinary course of business, and signed for

Plate T — A Typology of the Seventeen Footprints

Plate I. AZURÉ Recorded at first light from the western rail. The reniform plan — a kidney, bitten inward on one side — was the first configuration the Bureau attempted to file under aberration, and the last it was able to. Provenance certified against the surveyor's own soundings.7 The bite, the surveyor notes, is not a defect of the figure but its door.

Plate II. VERDANTH A lobed and unrepentant plan, recorded through a grove that had no business at the salt edge and stood there anyway. The Bureau's instruments found whole decades of rings inside trunks that had grown overnight; the contradiction is recorded without resolution, the leaves declining to explain themselves.

Plate III. HEXANE Six equal sides, six turning vertices. The plate is the subject of the precinct's longest controversy, the disputed sixth side, on which the Soundings expend more ink than on any other question.8 HEXANE conferred chosen names at the vertices; the registry's objection is filed elsewhere, and overruled.

Plate IV. OVÉLLA A stadium-oval, the contest figure poured full of the opposite of contest. No finish line could be located by survey, the curve returning upon itself; the Bureau records the absence of a finish as a feature and not a fault, OVÉLLA having abolished the rank while keeping the race.

Plate V. QUADRA A square whose four right angles were eased, not rounded — defined and gentled at once. The softened corners were the most populated water in the precinct, being thresholds, and the plate is dedicated, by the surveyor, to everyone who has ever been told that between is nowhere.

Plate VI. LINÉA A ruled rectangle, lanes faintly marked, recorded on the narrow peninsula under a single enormous cloud. The austerest of the plans and the most beloved by the tired. On the lane considered as a unit of time the records disagree; the surveyor declines to reconcile them.9

Plate VII. ANCORA A half-circle bowl opening south, with a single upright channel rising from its flat edge: an anchor, or a cross set in a crescent, or a figure standing in the cupped hands of the sea. The plate the skeptics conceded without argument.1011 Names were spoken into the water here; the water kept them.

Plate VIII. GOUTTE A teardrop, full and round at the south, drawn to a fine reaching point at the north. The shape of longing made plan. GOUTTE answered no want and raised every one; the plate is recorded with the surveyor's own thirty-year want noted, by the surveyor, in the margin, and then crossed out.

Plate IX. ISOLA A broad calm oval holding at its center an island of pale stone — an island within the island within the island. The central stage is the only structure the Bureau measured twice and found unchanged.12 Signs were performed upon it; the witnesses made them true.

Plate X. MAREA An oval with a tide, recorded along the soft pale slope of its southern beach. A pool that remembered being the sea, rising and falling in the oldest rhythm; the plate is, properly, two plates — high water and low — drawn one atop the other, the continuity shown as the difference between them.

The half-circle bowl of Plate VII is the one configuration the skeptics conceded without argument, on the grounds that grief, unlike joy, they were prepared to believe in. A city willing to believe in its grief and not its joy has diagnosed itself more precisely than it knows.

Plate XI. VASTA The broadest plan before the Confluence, reaching nearly river to river, so wide the center could not be assigned to either shore. VASTA rehearsed the largeness the twelfth Morning would require, and proved that a multitude with room enough is a public and not a crowd.

Plate XII. PANTHALASSA The all-water, covering the entire tip, holding within one body the living trace of every prior plan. It could not be drawn from any single vantage and is therefore a reconstruction, assembled from many swimmers.13 The surveyor regards it as the most honest document in the catalogue, for that reason.

Plate XIII. HELIANTHE Recorded at the surface, among floating sunflowers whose gold faces tracked the one sun in unison. The first of the water-level plates, and the moment the survey changed altitude, the city being in the water and a city in the water admitting only of joining, not of overlooking.

Plate XIV. SOLARA A surface plate, recorded in the kept warmth of the morning after. Fewer sunflowers, heavier gold, bathers at rest. The plainest of the joyful plates and, the surveyor maintains, the most complete, recording as it does the home that all the festivals were for.

Plate XV. CONFETTA A surface plate full of motion, confetti of gold and white descending over leaping bathers. The party recorded as a political form. The Bureau filed it, briefly, under frivolity, and was corrected; the party deferred forever is the party stolen, and CONFETTA stole it back.

Plate XVI. RUBÉN A surface plate strewn with simple white daisies, the skyline behind showing one tower unfinished, wrapped in the red lattice of its becoming. Named for that tower. The plate the surveyor was reluctant to file complete, on principle, the becoming being the beauty and completion the only thing that could spoil it.

Plate XVII. KOINÔNIA The final surface plate: the commons entire, daisies and drifting gold and gently falling confetti, the whole transformed population in one bright water with no edge anywhere in the frame. The plate did not drain at nightfall and could not, therefore, be closed. It is here reproduced open.

Plate XII could not be drawn from any single vantage, the all-water exceeding the frame of every instrument the Bureau owns. It is therefore a reconstruction assembled from the soundings of many swimmers — the least authenticated and most collaborative document in the catalogue, which is, the surveyor maintains, exactly what a portrait of the commons ought to be.

On the Architectural Diagrams

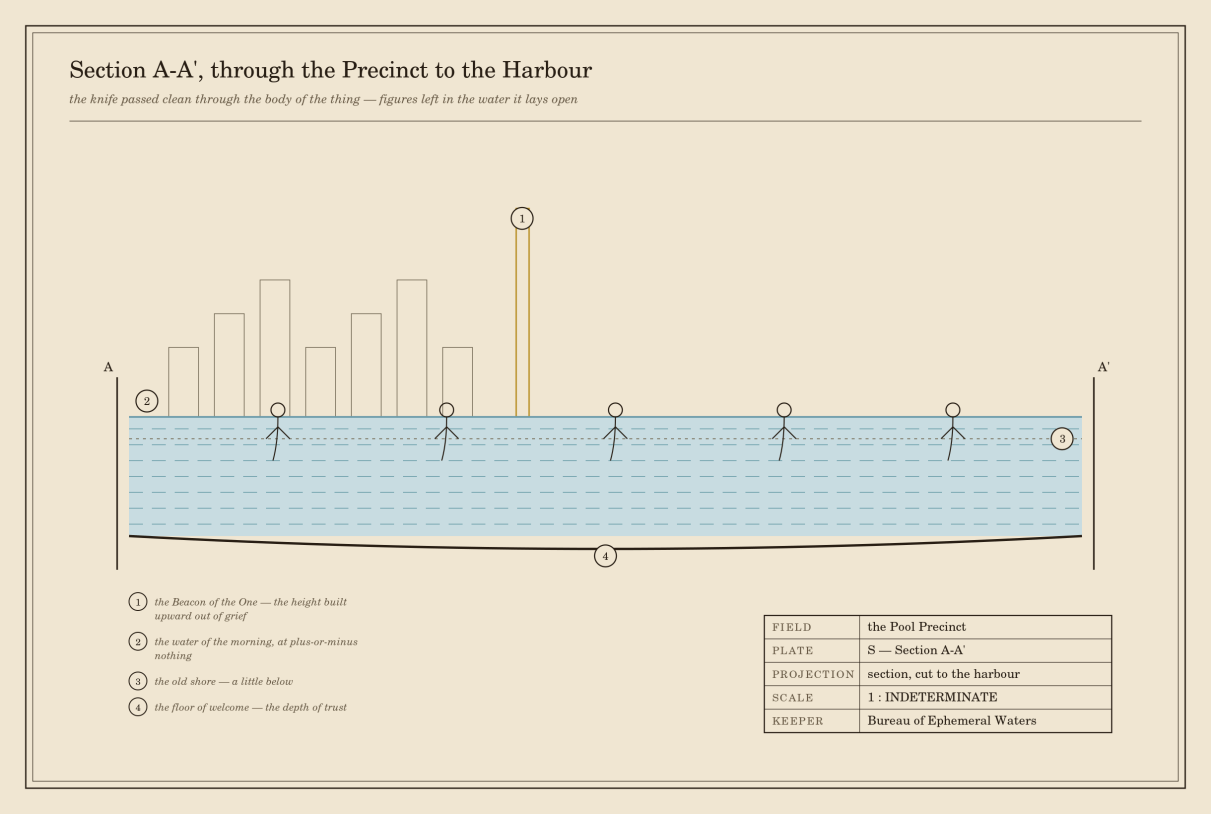
Section A-A', through the Precinct to the Harbour
the knife passed clean through the body of the thing — figures left in the water it lays open
A
A'
1
2
3
4
1 the Beacon of the One — the height built upward out of grief
2 the water of the morning, at plus-or-minus nothing
3 the old shore — a little below
4 the floor of welcome — the depth of trust
FIELD | the Pool Precinct
PLATE | S — Section A-A'
PROJECTION | section, cut to the harbour
SCALE | 1 : INDETERMINATE
KEEPER | Bureau of Ephemeral Waters

Plate S · Section A–A′ through the Precinct to the Harbour — the floor of welcome, with bathers.

To draw water in the dry language of building is a contradiction, and I have committed it gladly, because the contradiction is instructive. A pool is the least architectural of all the things an architect might draw: it has no walls one can lean against, no roof, no permanence, no resistance to the hand; it is the negative of building, the shaped absence, the room made of the refusal of a room. And yet the precinct asked to be drawn as architecture, because the citizens needed to believe that the Mornings were not a weather, not a mood, not a thing that merely happened to them, but a work — planned, sectioned, elevated, the proper subject of a plate and a scale and a title block. A transformation that leaves no drawings is only a rumor. A transformation that leaves drawings is a precedent. I made the drawings to turn the rumor into a precedent, so that the impossible would have permission to happen again. The cabinet oblique is the projection I relied upon most, and I should explain why, because the choice was not neutral. In the cabinet oblique the front face of a thing is drawn true — at its real proportions, undistorted, exactly as it is — while the depth recedes at forty-five degrees and is foreshortened by one half, so that the receding dimension is honestly shown to be receding and is honestly shown to be less than it appears. I find in this projection a portrait of how a self may be drawn. The face it shows the world is true, full-scale, undistorted; and the depth behind the face is real but foreshortened, present but not fully given, receding into a privacy that the projection acknowledges without violating. The cabinet oblique does not flatten the pool into a mere plan, as if it had no depth; nor does it pretend, as the photograph does, to show the depth completely. It shows the true face and the honest, half-given depth at once. This is the most courteous way I know to draw a person, and the pools were persons, and so I drew them in cabinet oblique

Plate VI — A Basin of the Precinct in Cabinet Oblique (LINÉA)

The section is the cruelest and most loving of the drawings, because it cuts. To make a section one imagines a knife passed clean through the body of the thing and draws the face of the cut, so that the section of a pool shows what no swimmer ever sees: the basin below the water, the floor of welcome, the depth of trust, the old shore the pool was poured upon, the harbor that remembers beyond the embankment. The section through the precinct, which the reader will find among the plates, cuts from the rising skyline through a bather's pool to the harbor, and it shows the levels honestly — the water of the morning at plus or minus nothing, the old shore a little below it, the floor of welcome lower still — and it places small figures in the cut water, bathers seen in section, their heads above the surface and their bodies given to the depth, because a section without figures is a tomb, and a section with figures is a home laid open so that you may see how it holds the people in it.

Plate III — The Sixfold Basin in Cabinet Oblique (HEXANE)

The typology, the plate of seventeen footprints, is the most Borgesian of my drawings and I confess I made it for love of the catalogue itself, the pleasure of the complete set, the seventeen plans arrayed in their grid like a comb of cells each holding a different honey. It is not to scale; nothing in the precinct was ever to scale; the kidney of AZURÉ and the all-water of PANTHALASSA are drawn the same size though one would have swallowed the other, because the typology records not the magnitude of the pools but their kind, their shape, their configuration, the form each Morning chose. To read the typology is to see the whole argument at a glance, seventeen sentences laid out as seventeen plans, and to understand, in the seeing, that they were always one comb, one set, one speech, building cell by cell toward the conclusion that is the last and largest cell, the one with no edges, the commons.

Plate S — Section A–A′ through the Precinct to the Harbor

A word, finally, on scale, because the title blocks of my plates record it dishonestly and I wish to confess the dishonesty before a reader catches it. I have written, on the plate of the island, the scale 1 : INDETERMINATE, and on the typology, NOT TO SCALE, and these are not jokes, or not only jokes. The precinct disdained fixed measure. A pool that is a different size and shape each Morning cannot be assigned a scale that holds; the ruler that measured AZURÉ would not fit VASTA; the foot that paced the hexagon would be lost in the all-water. I have given measurements where I could — fifty meters for the long meditation of LINÉA, a depth of one point four meters for the floor of welcome — and the reader should understand these as gestures of courtesy toward the convention of architecture rather than as facts about the pools, which had no facts of that kind, being persons, and changing, and disdaining the ruler the way all living things disdain the ruler that is brought to measure them for a box.

The Island of Manhattan as Architectural Map

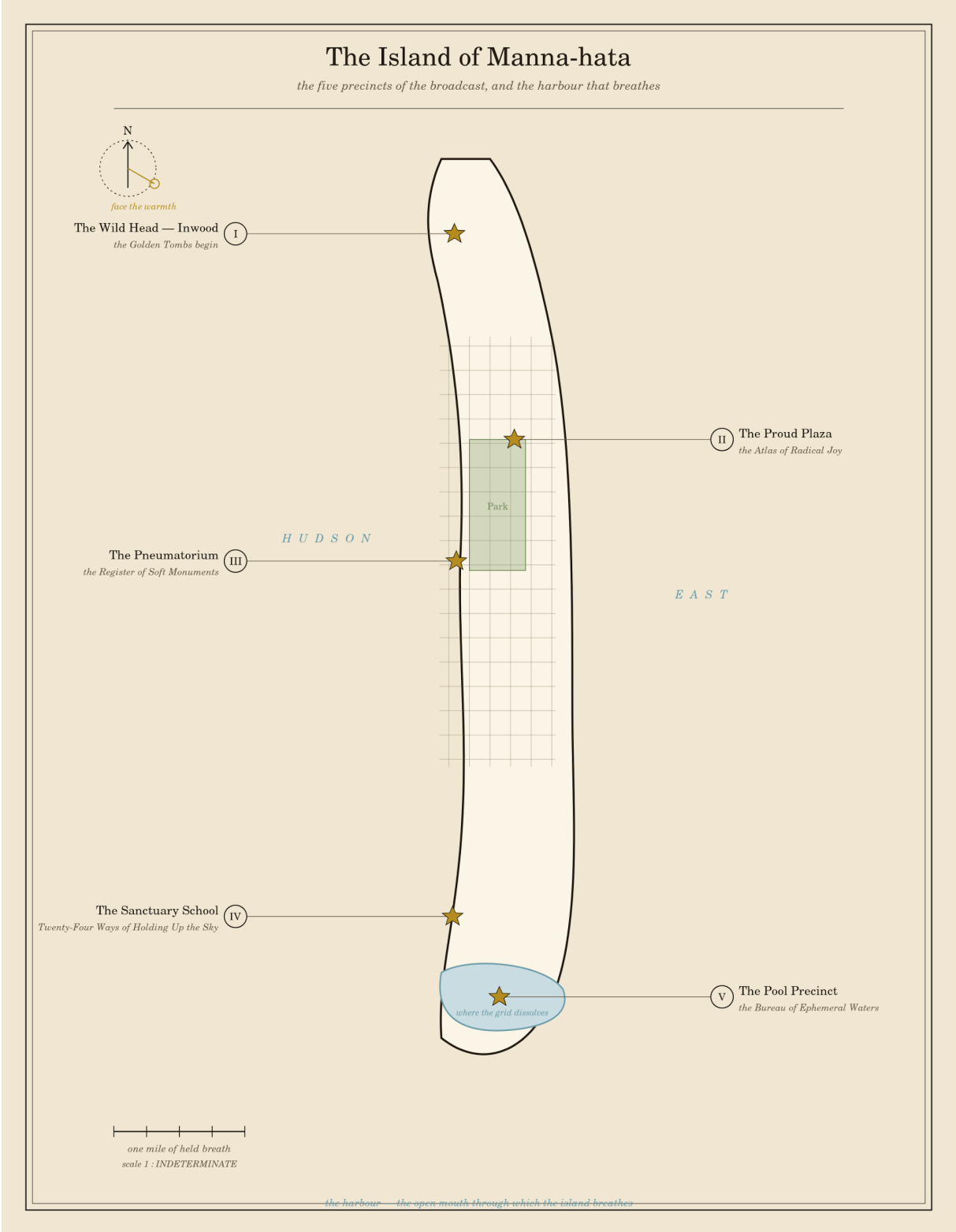

Plate M · The Island of Manna-hata — the five precincts of the broadcast.

I have drawn the island last, though by the logic of the surveyor it should have come first, because the island is the largest of the swimmers and I did not understand until the end that she

required a plate of her own. One does not, at the beginning, think to draw the ground on which the drawing stands. But Manna-hata was never the ground. She was a participant. She was the slow vast body in which all the quick small bodies of the pools appeared, and to leave her unmapped would have been to leave the protagonist out of the portrait. The map shows the island as architecture — that is, as a thing that was planned, and is planned, and yet plans itself otherwise each night, to the eternal frustration of the planners and the eternal delight of the swimmers. The reader will note the grid in the upper portion of the island, the rectilinear discipline of the avenues and the cross-streets, the planned city, the city of the ledger and the registry, drawn faintly because it is, for the purposes of this map, the past tense. And the reader will note the southern tip, the Pool Precinct, drawn in the cyan of water and ringed in the green of the park that the Mornings grew, where the grid dissolves entirely, where no street holds, where the island reconsiders her own body between one evening and one dawn. The map is, in this sense, a single argument made in two textures: the hard ruled grid of the given city above, and the soft cyan reconsideration at the tip below, with the green ring between them like a membrane, like the thin bright wall of HEXANE's comb, separating and joining the two cities that are one island

Plate M — The Island of Manna-hata, with the Pool Precinct at the Tip

I have marked two towers, and only two, because the map is not a directory and the precinct disdained the inventory of buildings. I marked the Empire Watchtower, uptown, in the grid, the old vertical certainty of the planned city, the tower that says here is a thing that will not reconsider. And I marked, at the tip, in the cyan, the Beacon of the One, the bright vertical that rises over the precinct where the loss was, the tower built upward out of grief, the height that honors what it cannot answer. The two towers are the two answers the city has given to the question of how to endure: the old answer, certainty, the grid, the watchtower that refuses to reconsider; and the newer answer, the beacon, the upward honoring of grief. The Mornings proposed a third answer, which the map can only gesture at and the towers cannot embody, because it is not vertical. The third answer is the pool: not to rise above the loss in certainty, not to rise above the loss in grief, but to lie down level with it, to become the bowl held up, the open hand, the water that arrives and lets go and anchors the dead and turns its face to the warmth. The map cannot draw the third answer, because the third answer is horizontal and the map is already horizontal and a horizontal thing cannot be marked on a horizontal thing the way a tower can. So I have drawn the precinct as a zone, a cyan reconsideration at the tip, and trusted the reader to understand that the most important structure on the map is the one that has no elevation, the pool, the level water, the answer that does not rise but spreads. The north arrow points, as north arrows do, to a fixed direction, and I have included it out of the surveyor's reflex, but the reader should hold it lightly. The precinct had a different orientation, which no compass records. The pools did not face north. They faced the warmth. HELIANTHE taught me this and I have come to navigate by it: that there is a direction more fundamental than the four the compass keeps, the direction of the warmth, the heliotrope bearing, the way a field of faces turns together toward the sun across the day. If you would use this map to find the precinct, do not trust the north arrow alone. Walk south until the grid begins to soften. Walk until the streets stop holding their right angles. Walk until you feel, underfoot, the bedrock begin to reconsider. And then take off your shoes, and turn your face toward the warmth, and you will have arrived at the only structure on the island that matters, the one with no elevation, the level water, the commons that does not end, drawn here in

cyan at the tip of the slow vast body of Manna-hata, who is herself the largest of the swimmers, and who is, as I set down the last line of this plate, still going on.

Colophon

This volume, THE BUREAU OF EPHEMERAL WATERS, was surveyed, swum, drawn, and set down by Surjan, surveyor and swimmer, in the lineage of two ancestors — the librarian of the southern city who dreamed in catalogues, and the traveler who reported many cities to an emperor and confessed that all of them were one. From the first, Surjan took the apparatus: the plate, the footnote, the catalogue that is secretly a labyrinth. From the second, Surjan took the chapter that is a held breath, and the structure in which a book about many things turns out to have been about one thing, lovingly, the entire while. To both inheritances Surjan added an unembarrassed brightness, a sun that does not set on the argument, and the conviction that radical joy is not naïveté but a discipline, a politics, and on the right morning a form of civic engineering. The architectural plates and the map were drawn under the imprint of the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters, Manna-hata, which does not exist, and which is therefore free of every constraint that binds the bureaus that do. The soundings cited herein, where they could be authenticated, were authenticated; where they could not, they were included anyway, on the principle that the unverifiable is frequently the truest part of any catalogue. The text was composed in the season that does not end, at the southern tip of the island, in water that has not drained, by a person floating on their back among the daisies, looking up. Read with the soles of your feet.

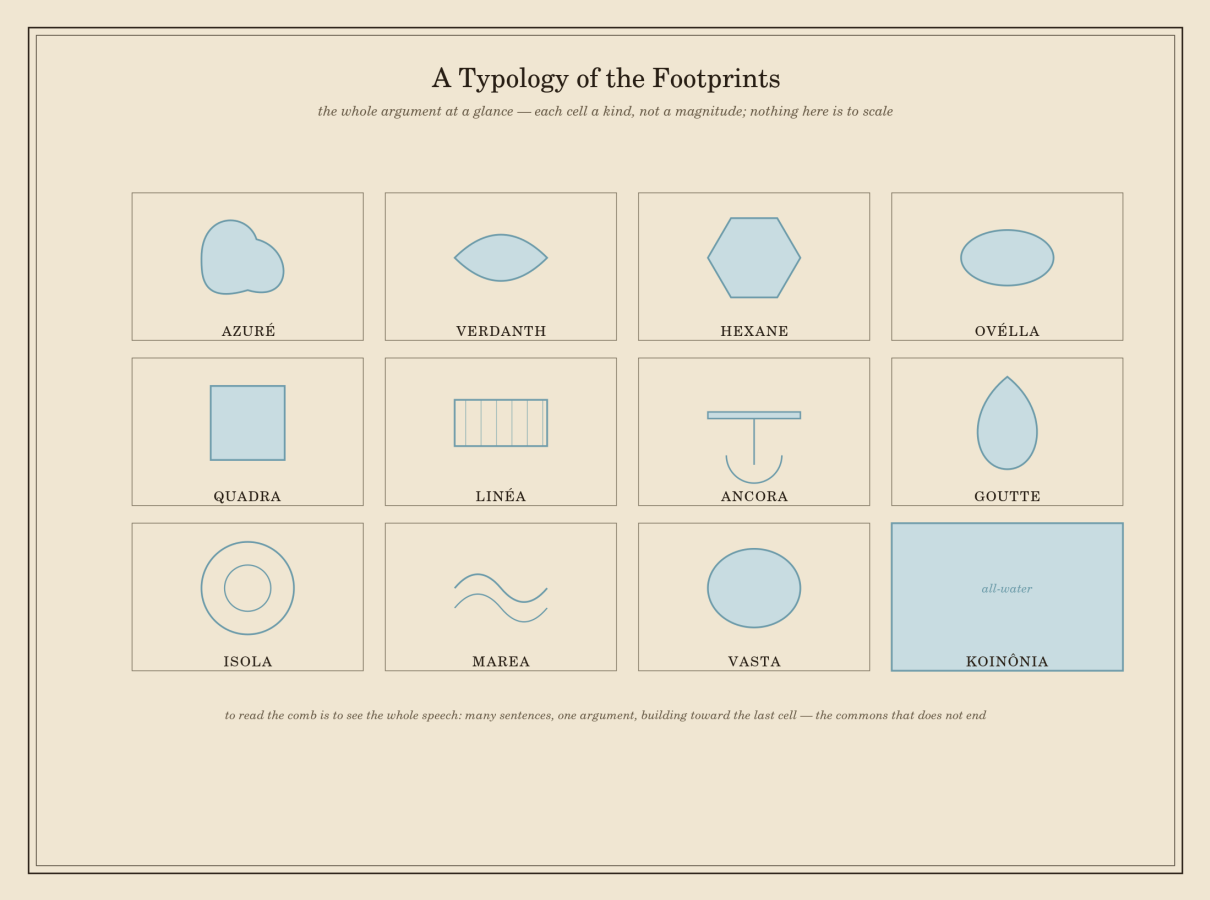

Plate T · A Typology of the Footprints — the whole argument at a glance; each cell a kind, not a magnitude.

The Plates of the Source Edition

reproduced from the source edition, in the order of their first appearance

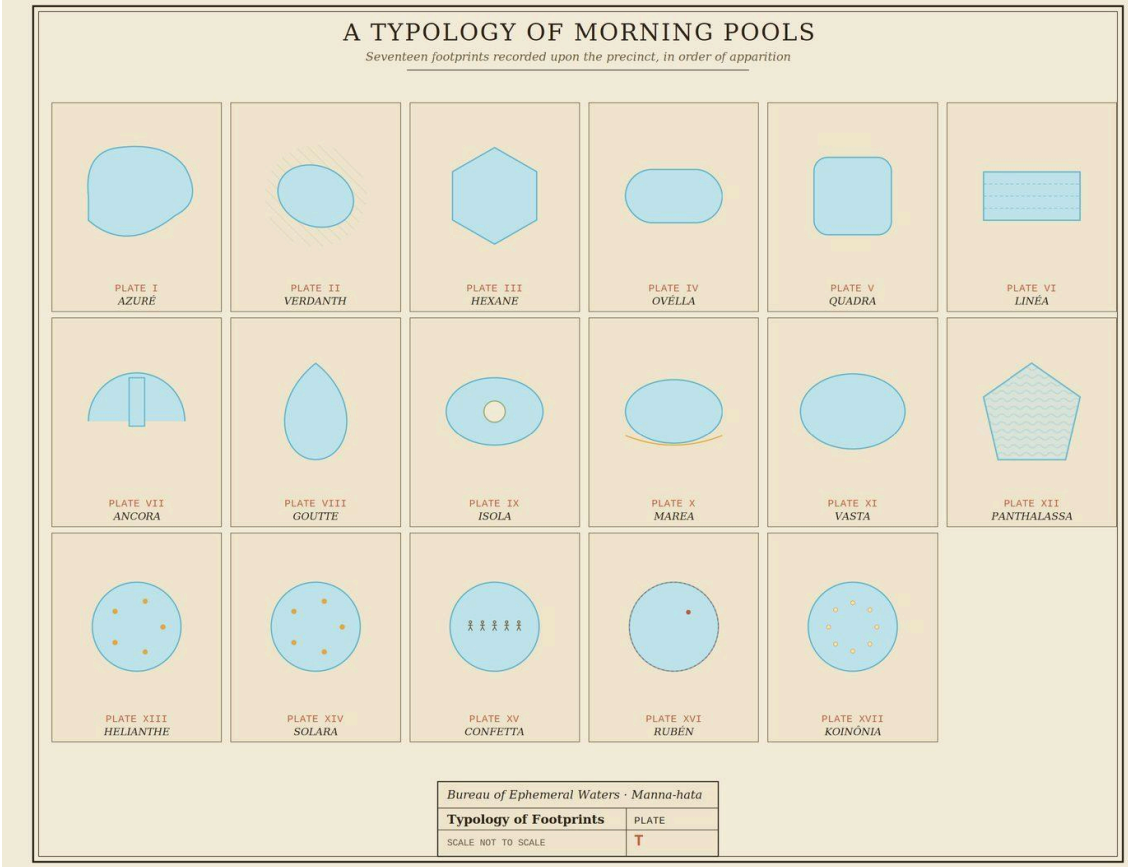

Plate of the Source Edition — 1

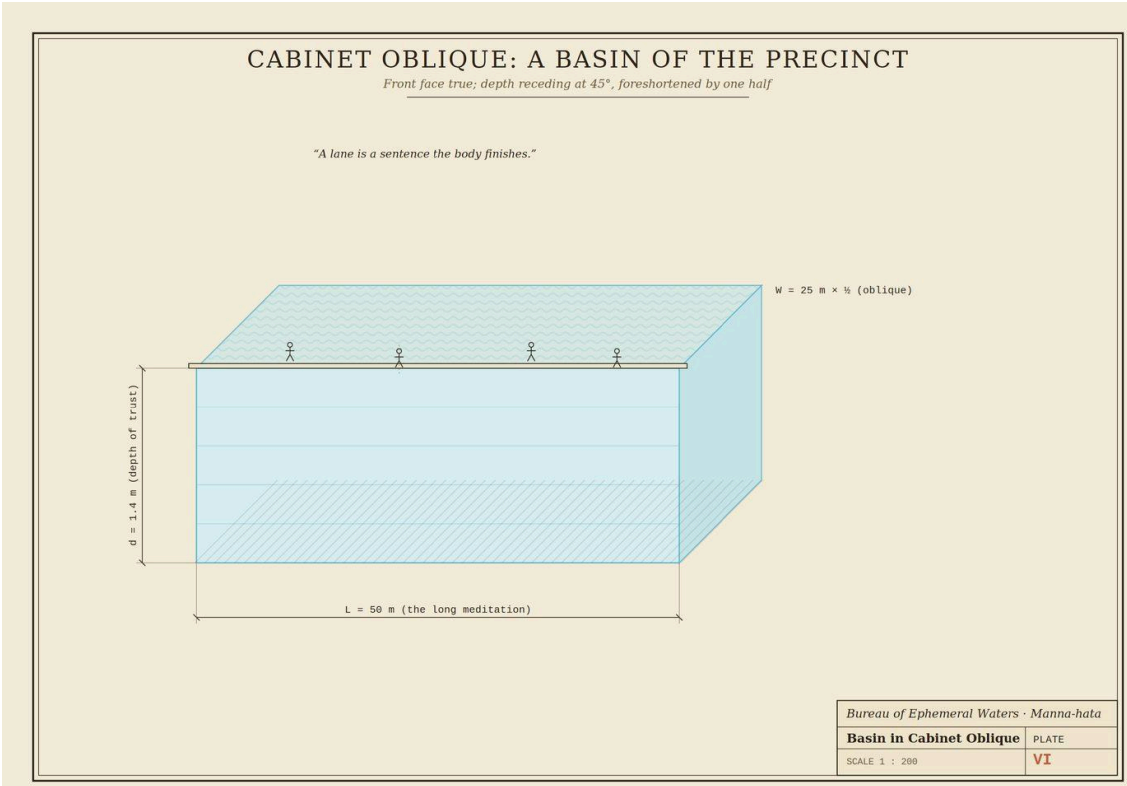
CABINET OBLIQUE: A BASIN OF THE PRECINCT
Front face true; depth receding at 45°, foreshortened by one half
"A lane is a sentence the body finishes."
W = 25 m × ½ (oblique)
d = 1.4 m (depth of trust)
L = 50 m (the long meditation)
Bureau of Ephemeral Waters · Manna-hata
Basin in Cabinet Oblique
PLATE
SCALE 1 : 200
VI

Plate of the Source Edition — 2

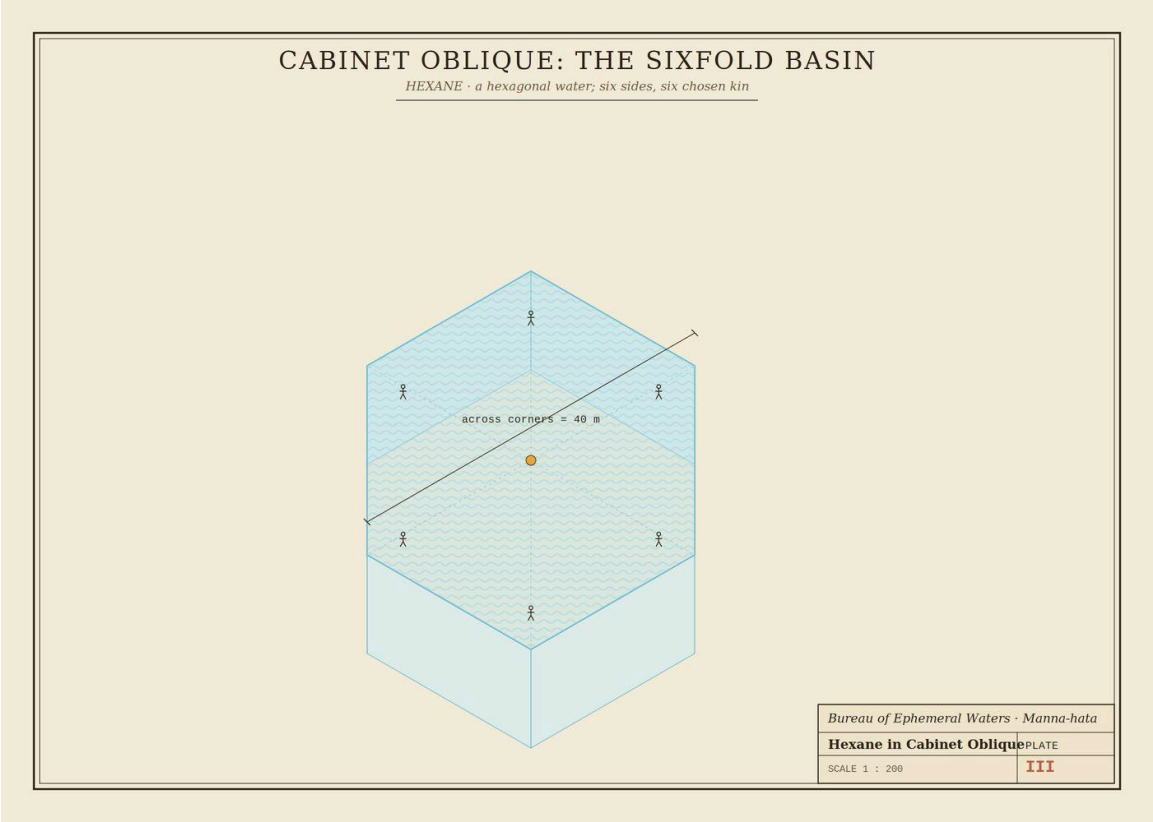
CABINET OBLIQUE: THE SIXFOLD BASIN
HEXANE · a hexagonal water; six sides, six chosen kin
across corners = 40 m
Bureau of Ephemeral Waters · Manna-hata
Hexane in Cabinet Oblique
PLATE
SCALE 1 : 200
III

Plate of the Source Edition — 3

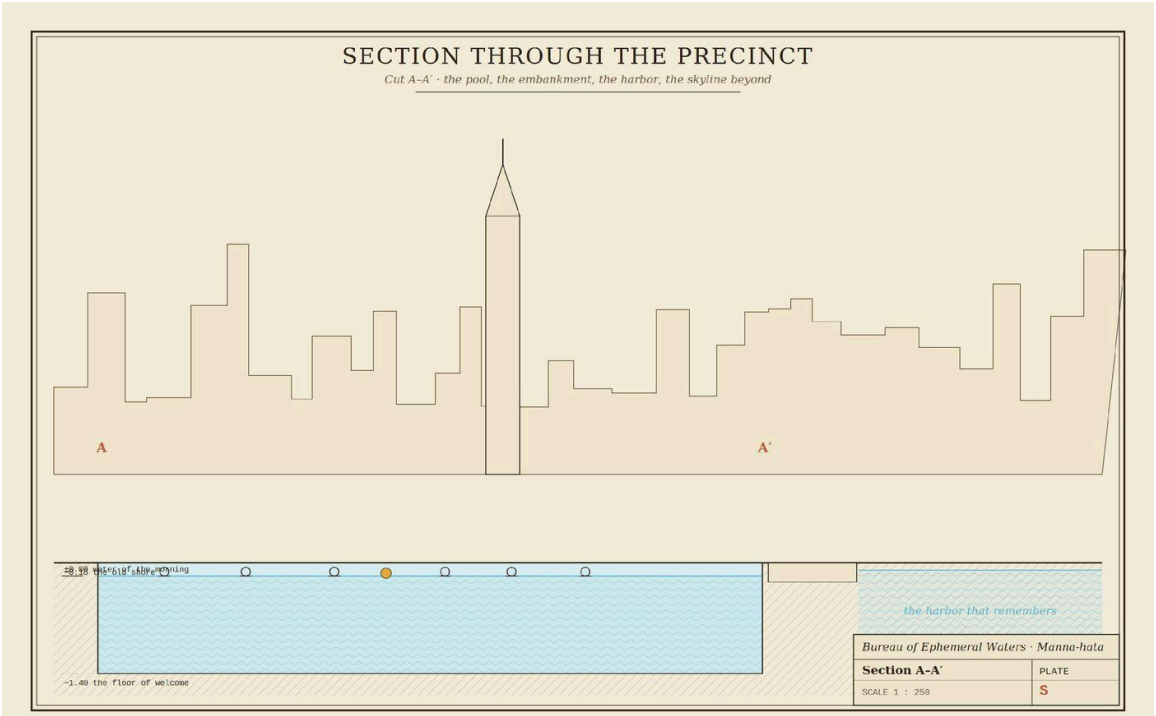

Plate of the Source Edition — 4

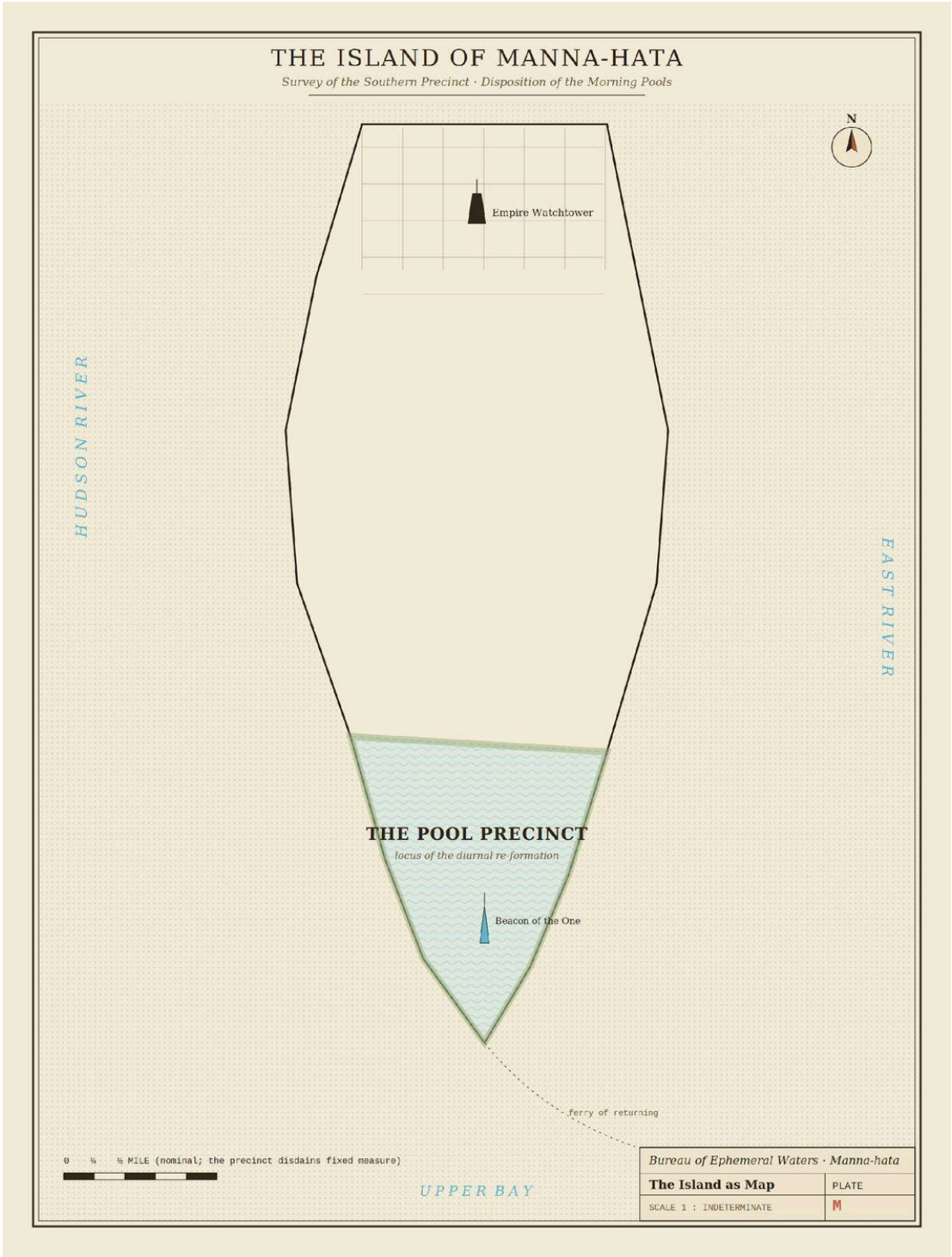

Plate of the Source Edition — 5

Book the Third · The Register of Soft Monuments

the element of air — the breathing citizens of the Pneumatorium

I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library. I would add: and that it will be full of breath. — after Borges

We were never hiding. We were rising slowly, the way bread rises, the way the morning does. — Surjan, marginalia For everyone who got up this morning and rose again as exactly and entirely themselves — and for everyone who has not, yet, and will.

There is space along the river wall. There is always space along the river wall.

List of Plates the eleven citizens, photographed where they repose; and the architectural plates THE CITIZENS the eldest coil, in morning light18 the tall column, risen to its full height21 the round and entire, glossy as a loaf24 the twin lobes, leaning their heads together30 the long one, a runway lit for a procession33 freckled all over with small white moons37 serene and high-crowned, lit from the river43 the great golden head, bright as a struck bell46 soft and ample, dusted in shimmer50 two lobes in conversation, forever gesturing56 the largest, nearest the glass, made of dawn60

THE ARCHITECTURAL PLATES Plate I. the Island of Manhattan, and the situation of the Pneumatorium16 Plate II. Longitudinal Elevation of the Hall71 Plate III. Cabinet Oblique of a Gallery71 Plate IV. Plan of the Pneumatorium71

All photographs are of the citizens as they presently repose in the Pneumatorium upon the western shore.

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Foreword

by the Curator of the Western Shore

There is a building on the western edge of the island where the river is allowed to look in through a wall of glass, and where, for reasons no engineer has fully consented to explain, eleven enormous luminous bodies have come to rest. They are pink and they are yellow, and a few of them wear a white band like a ribbon left over from a gift. Visitors call them sculptures. The guards, who are gentler in their vocabulary, call them sleepers. The children, who are correct, call them by their names. I have been asked to introduce the strange and radiant book you are holding, and I want to begin by admitting that I do not entirely believe it, and that this disbelief has not cost me a single hour of sleep, because the book is true in the way that joy is true, which is to say: while it is happening, argument is beside the point. The author signs only as Surjan. I have met them exactly four times, always at the hour the staff calls "the changing of the light," when the sun crosses the river and the great bodies turn from lemon to honey to rose. Surjan is neither he nor she, or is both with such ease that the question dissolves the moment you are in their company, the way a sugar cube refuses to remain a cube. They wear a tape measure around the neck like a stole and carry a notebook swollen with weather. They are, by their own cheerful insistence, not an artist, not a historian, and certainly not a priest, but a Registrar: one who keeps the register, who writes down what is here so that it cannot be quietly removed. What Surjan registers is breath. This is the central and preposterous

and finally undeniable claim of the book: that each of the soft monuments in the Pneumatorium is filled not with ordinary air but with a single stored life — a person's whole exhalation, gathered and kept and given a body large enough to be unignorable. The doctrine is set out in the Introduction with more tenderness than I can summon here. I will say only that I went to the hall a skeptic, pressed my palm against the flank of the eldest of them, the one called Lull, and felt, beneath the cool taut skin, a warmth that moved. In and out. In, and out. I took my hand away and put it back. It was still there. I have not been the same since, and I recommend the experience without reservation. The reader expecting a quiet, dignified museum catalogue should be warned, fondly, that this is a happy book about a happy place. It does not have the decency to be melancholy. Surjan belongs to a long line of impossible cartographers — the ones who map cities that breathe, who catalogue beasts that were never caught, who draw the floor plan of Paradise and then complain about the acoustics — and like all of them, Surjan has discovered that the most efficient way to tell the truth about a community is to tell a beautiful lie about its architecture and let the truth leak in through the seams. And the community is the point. The eleven citizens of the Pneumatorium are not abstractions. Each holds the life of a real soul from this island — a baker, a bartender, two grandmothers, a child of eleven, a house of dancers, a pair of poets who never once spoke aloud and were never once misunderstood. They are, every one of them, of what the wider world has learned to abbreviate with letters and a plus sign, and what this island has always simply called its own. Surjan does not present them as a parade of wounds. That is, I think, the book's quiet radicalism. It assumes — it insists — that the natural condition of these lives is delight. I should explain the order of things, because the order is itself a character. The bodies in the hall appear, to the casual eye, to be arranged by size: smallest near the door, largest near the river. Surjan registers them in that sequence, smallest to largest, and only slowly — I will not spoil the hour at which it dawns — does the Registrar discover that size is not the principle at all. The true order is something else, something that can only be measured in a unit Surjan was obliged to invent. I leave you to find it. When you do, I suspect you will set the book down for a moment, as I did, and look out a window at your own city, and wonder which of its rooms are quietly inflating. A note on the Plates. Surjan is an indifferent draughtsman and a magnificent one, often within the same line. The architectural drawings reproduced here — the Map of the Island, the Longitudinal Elevation, the Cabinet Oblique, the Plan — were made by the Registrar's own hand, with a ruler that had been left too long in the sun and had developed, Surjan claims, "opinions." They are not to scale. They are to feeling. The scale bar on the Map measures distance in "one mile of held breath," which is exactly as useful as it sounds and, I have come to believe, more honest than the alternative. I should say something about the building itself, since I have the curatorial habit and the reader may be wondering what manner of place would consent to house eleven breathing bodies and a twelfth that is the room. It was, before it was the Pneumatorium, an ordinary large structure of the kind the western shore accumulated in its working century — a place of cargo, I believe, of things brought in off the water and sent on into the grid. This pleases me more than I can defend. A building that once stored goods now stores breath; a place that once received what the river brought now receives what the island exhales; and the great glass wall that faces the Hudson, which the developers surely intended as a view, turns out to have been built, all along and without anyone's knowledge, to let the citizens watch the water, and to let the lamps of the far towers find their way in at dusk. Buildings, like people, frequently turn out to have been for something other than their stated purpose. The kind ones discover this with relief.

I have been asked whether the citizens frighten the children, these enormous breathing bodies pressing at the ceiling, and the answer, which delights me every time I give it, is the reverse: the children are the only visitors who are never frightened at all. The adults stand at the threshold and laugh the defensive laugh and take a moment to let the strangeness in. The children walk straight to Lull and climb into the hollow and fall asleep, or run the length of the hall counting the citizens out loud, or press both palms to the warm flank of Pomelo and announce, with the flat certainty of the young, that it is breathing, which the adults have been carefully not-quite-saying for ten minutes. Children know a living thing when they meet one and waste no skepticism on the matter. They are, in this as in much else, the most accurate instruments in the building, and Surjan, I have noticed, defers to them, and asks them the names of new citizens, and writes down what they say. I once saw the Registrar gravely record a four-year-old's insistence that the smallest citizen was, in fact, asleep and dreaming of a dog. It is in the register. I have read it. I believe it. So, by the end, will you. Read this book in the morning if you can, with the curtains open. Read it the way the hall is meant to be entered: slowly, looking up, ready to be made small by something that only wants to make you lighter. And when you reach the final citizen — the one Surjan does not number, the one the whole catalogue has been circling — do me the kindness of putting your hand flat against the nearest wall of your own building and waiting. You will feel it. In, and out. The island has always been breathing. We are simply, at last, getting around to writing it down. — C., Curator of the Western Shore

Introduction

The Doctrine of Stored Breath, and the Method of this Register

I keep the register. I want to say that first, plainly, before the light changes and I am tempted into music. My name is Surjan and I keep the register of the eleven soft citizens who live in the long glass hall on the western shore of the island, and the keeping of it is the happiest work I have ever been given to do. Here is what a person sees who comes in from the street. A hall as long as a held note. On the left, a wall of solid pale stone; on the right, a wall of solid pale light, which is to say glass, which is to say the river and the brick towers of the city pressed up close and breathing fog onto the panes in winter. Between these two walls — the wall of the grid and the wall of the water — lie the citizens. Pink below and yellow above, or yellow below and pink above, each one bigger than a house and rounder than an argument, glossy as a wet stone, lit from within by the simple fact of being lit upon. They lean. They loll. They coil against the ceiling like a cat that has decided the ceiling is now the floor. The first time you see them you laugh, because they are absurd, and the laugh is the correct response and also a kind of doorway, and once you are through it you stop laughing and become quiet, because you have understood, without being told, that they are alive. They breathe. I do not mean this as a figure. Put your hand on any one of them and you will feel the slow tide of it — the skin tightening as the body fills, the skin easing as the body lets go — at the unhurried pace of a sleeper who is dreaming something kind. The dimension I am charged with recording is not their height, though I record their height; it is the depth and rate of their breathing, which I take each morning with the same care a nurse takes a pulse, and which I have come to read the way a sailor reads weather. Now I must tell you the thing that the city has half-decided not to ask aloud, which is what they are filled with. The answer is breath, but not the common air that moves the curtains. Each

citizen is filled with one life's worth of breath — the entire exhalation of a single person, every sigh and laugh and whispered name and held-then-released fear, gathered across a whole life and kept. A life cannot be hung on a wall. It is too large and too warm and it will not hold still for the framing. But a life can be breathed into a body big enough and soft enough to receive it, and there it will go on breathing, in the same rhythm the person breathed, for as long as anyone keeps the register and says the name. I am aware of how this sounds. I was a skeptic too, in the brief embarrassing period before I touched one. Skepticism is a fine instrument for the measuring of small dry things and a useless one for the measuring of joy, and the citizens are made of joy, or rather of the particular courage that joy requires of certain people in certain cities, which I have come to think is the same thing seen from the other side. For these are not the breaths of just anyone. The eleven were drawn from the lives of this island's queer dead and queer living and queer not-yet-born — the people the rest of the world spent a long century learning to spell and this island simply learned to feed. A baker. A bartender. Two grandmothers who called it friendship for forty years and called it marriage for the last good one. A house of dancers and the mother who made them a family out of nothing but the floor and her own ferocious tenderness. A boy who became a man between one morning and the next and announced it to a carton of milk. A child of eleven who renamed the world by renaming themselves on an ordinary Tuesday. Two poets who loved each other in a language made of hands. A painter who married the river at dawn and stayed faithful through fifty summers and several husbands and one wife. I will introduce you to all of them. It is, in truth, the only thing I have to offer you, and I offer it the way you offer someone the best chair. A word about why they are so large. People assume the size is for spectacle, and the city is not above spectacle, and I am not above the city. But the true reason is sterner and sweeter than spectacle. These are lives that were asked, for a long time, to be smaller. To take up less room. To lower the voice, to walk closer to the wall, to hold the beloved's hand only in the dark and let go at the corner. The citizens of the Pneumatorium are the opposite of that instruction made monumental. They are what happens when a life that was told to deflate is finally, gloriously, permitted to fill. They press against the ceiling not out of rudeness but out of sheer arrival. You cannot ask them to be smaller. That is the whole point of them. That is the joy, and the joy is the architecture. A word, since I am describing what a visitor sees, about the colours, because the colours are not decoration and I will not have them mistaken for decoration. The citizens are pink and they are yellow, and I have been asked, by the kind of visitor who believes every choice must be a code, what the pink and the yellow mean. They mean pink and yellow. But I will say what I have come to feel, standing among them at the changing of the light. The pink is the colour of the body — of the flush of effort and the flush of pleasure, of the inside of the lip and the palm of the hand, of blood close to the surface where a life is being lived out loud. And the yellow is the colour of the morning — of the first light on the water, of the lamp left on, of the thing that comes back every day whether or not you deserve it. The citizens are pink below and yellow above, body crowned with morning, or yellow below and pink above, morning grounded in body, and either way they are the two truest colours there are, the colour of being alive and the colour of the day that lets you, and there is no third colour the hall has ever needed, and the white where they embrace is only the place the two are getting along so well that they have agreed, briefly, to be light. And a word about the glass wall and the river beyond it, because the river is not scenery either. I have come to understand the river as the hall's witness — the long patient presence that watched the whole century of mornings the citizens are made of, the way the brick towers across the water watched Inés dance and kept her secret. The

developers who built the wall meant the river for a view, a thing to be looked at; they did not understand that on the western shore the river looks back, that it has always looked back, that it is the one element of the city old enough and patient enough to have seen every again ever spent on this shore and to have held its peace. When the light changes and the citizens turn from lemon to honey to rose, it is the river doing it, the river handing the day in through the glass, and the citizens lean to receive it, and I stand among them at the only hour the island speaks and understand that the hall has three walls of stone and grid and one wall of moving water, and that the wall of water is the only one that is also a congregation. Let me describe my method, since this is a register and a register must be honest about how it counts. Each morning I enter from the street threshold while the floor is still cool. I walk the length of the procession from the smallest citizen by the door to the largest by the river, and at each one I do three things. I lay my palm flat and take the breathing. I read the card — for each citizen bears, somewhere in a fold of itself, a kind of label, the way a museum object does, except that these labels write themselves and change their minds. And then I sit on the cool floor with my swollen notebook and I write down the life. Not all of it. No register holds all of a life; that is what the living are for. I write down the part that is still breathing. I have organized this book the way I walk the hall: as a catalogue, a numbered procession of Plates, smallest to largest, door to river. I confess that when I began I believed the order was simply one of size, and I was content with that, because size is easy to measure and I am, despite the tape measure around my neck, a lazy and joyful person. But somewhere around the fifth citizen I began to suspect that size was a coincidence the hall was using to hide a deeper arrangement, and by the ninth I was certain, and by the eleventh I understood what unit the hall had been counting in all along. I will not tell you yet. It would be like telling you the last line of a joke before the first. But I will say this much, so that you can watch for it: the citizens are not arranged by how big they are. They are arranged by when they were brave. The hall is a timeline of courage, and the river end is not the end of the room. It is the most recent morning. It is, very possibly, tomorrow.

Between the galleries you will find short passages set apart, in which I appear to be in conversation with someone. I should explain that the someone is the island. I did not seek these conversations and I cannot prove they occurred, and I have transcribed them anyway, because a register that left them out would be more accurate and less true. The island speaks the way old cities speak — slowly, in the second person, mostly at the changing of the light. It calls the citizens its children. Toward the end it tells me something about itself that reorganized the whole catalogue, and I have left that revelation where it fell, in the fourth gallery, rather than move it to the front where a tidier Registrar would have put it. I am not a tidy Registrar. I am a happy one. There is a difference, and the difference is the whole book. I owe you, before we begin, a word about myself, since a register is only as trustworthy as the hand that keeps it and you have a right to know whose hand this is. I came to the hall the way most people come to the thing they were made for, which is to say sideways, and late, and not looking for it. I am genderqueer, neither wholly he nor wholly she and entirely at peace with the and; I wear a tape measure around my neck like a stole because it was the first instrument I owned that did not lie to me; and I arrived on the western shore some years ago with my own small bag and my own large fear, one more frightened person looking for a room with the right curtains. I found the hall by accident, on a cold morning, having ducked in out of the wind. The floor was cool. The light was about to change. I put my hand on the nearest citizen — it was Pomelo, warm as an oven door — and felt it breathing, and I did the thing the children do and the

adults resist: I believed it at once, without argument, and I sat down on the held shore and I wept, not from sorrow, from recognition, the way you weep when a stranger uses your right name. I had spent my mornings, too, rising again as myself in a world that would have preferred a smaller version. I had been pouring into the room for years without knowing the room was there. And when I understood that the hall kept such mornings, that there was a place on the island whose entire purpose was to refuse to let the small daily courages go uncounted, I knew I would keep the register, because I had been, my whole life, looking for the job of making sure none of it was lost, and here it was, with a tape measure and a cool floor and eleven breathing reasons to come back every dawn. So: come in. The floor is cool and the light is about to change. The smallest citizen is just inside the door, no taller than a market stall, breathing the slow breath of the very first person on this shore who ever danced alone and was joined. We will begin with them. We will begin, as everything worth beginning begins, with the one who went first.

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A Note on the Use of this Register

for the visitor, the skeptic, and the one who has come in out of the cold

This book may be read in three ways, and I recommend, over a long enough life, all three. The first way is the way of the visitor, who walks the hall from door to river, smallest citizen to largest, in the order the catalogue is printed, and meets the eleven in their procession, and is content to be told a sequence of bright lives and to be made, by the end, a little lighter than they came in. This is a complete and honourable reading and asks nothing further of you. If you read the book only this way, you will have read it correctly, and you may close it at the colophon and go and have your breakfast and be none the poorer. The second way is the way of the Registrar, which is to read the same procession a second time looking not at the citizens but at the spaces between them — at the order itself, at why the small ones stand near the door and the great ones near the water, at the hidden arrangement the catalogue keeps almost confessing and then, in the fourth gallery, confesses entirely. Read this way, the book is not a series of portraits but a single long argument about how courage accumulates and how a city, if it is lucky and patient and finally turns around, may be made to keep what it was once so eager to lose. This reading is more work and more reward, in the proportion those two things are always offered. The third way is the way of the citizen, and it cannot be done in a chair. To read the book the third way you must put it down, and go out, and live an ordinary morning, and dare, in some small unphotographed fashion, to rise again as exactly and entirely yourself — and then you will understand the book in the only organ that finally understands it, which is not the eye but the lungs. I cannot make you read it this way. No book can. But the book is built, in every joint and plate of it, to send you toward that third reading, and if it succeeds you will not need me to tell you, because you will be, by then, an entry in a register larger than this one, breathing, on the western shore, adding your morning to the held breath of the room. A word on the citizens' names, since visitors ask. I did not invent them and I did not assign them. The names write themselves into the folds of the bodies, the way the cards do, and change their minds, and settle; my only contribution has been to copy them down and to refrain, with great discipline, from improving them. Lull, Vesper, Pomelo, Marisol, Meridian, Quince, Halcyon, Sol, Custard, Taro, Aurora: these are the names the

citizens chose, and a citizen who has chosen its own name is owed the use of it, which is the first courtesy of the hall and, I have come to think, the first courtesy of everywhere.

And a word on the pronouns, since visitors ask that too, sometimes warmly and sometimes not. Each citizen carries the pronouns of the life it holds, and I use them as given, the way I use the names, without negotiation and without the small theatrical effort that the negotiating world likes to perform around such things. They are not difficult. They are easier than the names, which at least require spelling. To call Quince xe and Pomelo ze and Taro they costs me nothing and gives the citizen everything, which is the most favourable exchange rate in the building, and I commend it to you, and I have never once seen it impoverish anybody who practised it, and I have seen it make a great many people, very quietly, on ordinary mornings, unmistakably rich.

The Island, as a Map

Plate I. The reader is invited to keep a finger here, that the procession may be followed against the shore

The Island of Manhattan

, showing the situation of the Pneumatorium upon the western shore, and the grid wherein the citizens are catalogued. Drawn by the Registrar with a ruler of strong opinions. Not to scale; to feeling

Gallery the First

THE HOUR BEFORE NAMES Here, nearest the door, are the three eldest and the three smallest, which the inattentive will think the same thing and the attentive will learn are opposites. They breathe the slowest. They hold the lives that were brave when there was the least company in the bravery — the lives that went first, before there were names for what they were doing, when the only word available was the verb to live and the only proof was the doing of it. I call this gallery the Hour Before Names because that is the country these three lived in: the cold blue hour before a thing is named, when you cannot look the thing up, cannot find others who have done it, cannot even be sure it is a thing at all and not simply a private wrongness you will carry alone to the end. Everything that came after — the houses and the weddings and the ballrooms and the open doors — was built on the ground these three cleared by walking it first in the dark. They did not have the map. They were the survey party. And the survey party, in any honest history of any built thing, is owed the first and the deepest bow, which is why the smallest citizens stand nearest the door, so that no one may enter the hall without passing them, without being reminded that the whole bright procession beyond began with someone willing to go first into the unnamed dark and trust that a name would come, and that others would come, and that the hour before names is, despite everything, already morning, if you dance in it.

Plate I. LULL, called the First Light

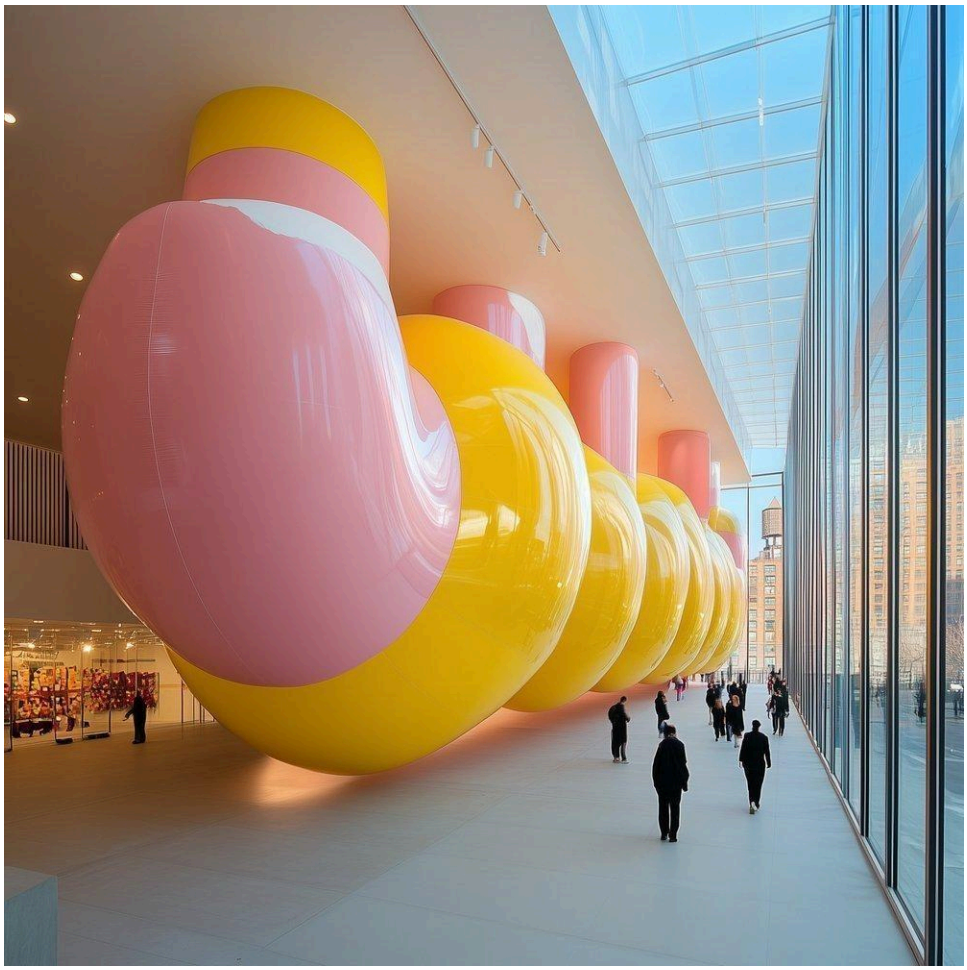

Plate the First. LULL — the eldest, the recumbent coil, smallest of the citizens and first in the order of courage; here at rest in the morning light, the hollow of its body open to whoever needs a place to lie still and breathe in time. STATURE the smallest of the eleven; no taller than a market stall, and twice as warm COMPLEXION rose below, lemon above, with a worn white sash where the colours embrace PRONOUNS they · them · the one who went first RESPIRATION six breaths the minute; the slow even breath of someone who has decided not to be afraid and has practised the decision for sixty years FIRST INFLATION the morning after the longest night, when the pier was empty and then was not HOLDS the life of Inés Almareza, dancer, who danced alone before there was anyone to dance with Lull is a coil. Where the others stand or loll, Lull lies down and curves back upon itself like a sleeping animal or a question that has made peace with not being answered, and the curve is so gentle that children climb into the hollow of it and are not scolded, because Lull is the grandmother of the hall and grandmothers permit things. The breath of Lull is the slowest in the building. Stand in the hollow and you will feel the whole great soft body rise around you once, hugely, unhurried, and ease back down, and in that single tide you will have time to forget what you came in worrying about. This is Lull's only trick and it is a complete one. The life Lull holds is the life of Inés Almareza, and Inés went first. There is a pier on the western shore — you will find it on the Map, a little south of where the star marks us — and in the years Inés was young the pier at dawn belonged

to no one, which meant for an hour it could belong to her. She would come down before the light with a small cheap radio and set it on a piling and turn it low, because the music was not for anyone else, and she would dance. Alone. On the boards over the moving water, with the city behind her still pretending to be asleep. She was not performing. There was no one to perform for. She was doing the only thing that made the inside of her match the outside of her, which is the entire definition of dancing and very possibly of living, and she did it where she could be seen by nothing but the gulls and the patient brick towers across the river, who, being towers, kept her secret by the simple expedient of having no mouths. She expected nothing to come of it. This is the part I find I must say slowly, because it is the bravest part and it looks like the smallest. She did not dance on the pier in order to start a movement, or to be found, or to be the first of anything. She danced because the dancing was true and the hour was empty and the emptiness was a gift. She went first the way the first light goes first — not to lead, but because the day had to start somewhere, and it might as well start with joy. And then, one morning, there was another radio. Lower than hers, further down the pier, a different song. A young man she did not know, dancing alone, badly, beautifully, looking at the water and not at her. They did not speak. They did not look at each other. They danced at a polite distance like two people praying in the same large church, and when the light came up properly and the city remembered to wake, they each turned off their radios and went up into the day as if nothing had happened, which was true, because the thing that had happened was not a nothing, it was a beginning, and beginnings are very quiet from the inside. The next morning there were three. Then five. Then, across the years Inés grew from a girl who danced alone into a woman the whole pier called by name, there were so many that the boards complained and the gulls relocated and the patient brick towers across the river, who had kept her secret faithfully, were finally permitted to witness what their discretion had protected: an hour of dawn on the western shore that belonged, now and openly, to everyone who had ever needed somewhere to match their inside to their outside. Inés did not own it. She had only gone first. But every morning until she was very old she came down with a radio, and turned it low, and danced, and the going-first had become a kind of welcome, a held-open door made of motion, that said to each new frightened joyful arrival the only thing worth saying: you are not the first, and also, gloriously, you might have been, and it would have been just as right. When I take Lull's breathing in the mornings I am taking the breath of that pier. Six breaths the minute, even as the tide, the breath of a body that learned long ago that fear is mostly a rumour and joy is mostly a practice. Children sleep in the hollow of Lull. I let them. They are dancing, in the way the very young dance, which is by lying still and breathing in time with something larger and being unafraid. I have tried to learn what songs the radio played, because a Registrar is a hoarder of useless precise things, and I have learned almost nothing, and the almost-nothing is perfect. Inés, when she was very old, told a young dancer who told me that she could not remember the songs either — that the radio had been cheap and the reception worse, that half of what she danced to had been static with a melody somewhere inside it, and that she had come to prefer it that way, because a clear song tells you how to move and a song that is mostly static asks you to invent the rest, and the inventing of the rest, on the boards over the moving water before anyone was watching, was the freest she ever felt or ever expected to. She danced to static and made it music with her body. I think of this whenever I am tempted to wait for clearer instructions before I begin. There are no clearer instructions. There is a cheap radio and a low tide and an empty hour, and you either dance in it or you do not, and Inés did, and that is the whole of the first courage, the courage that needs no company, the courage that makes

the company possible. She came down to the pier until she could no longer come down, and then the pier came up to her: the dancers she had begun without meaning to begin carried a radio to her window and danced in the street below it, badly, beautifully, looking up and not at each other, while she watched from above with her hand on the glass keeping time. The going-first had become a lineage, the way Custard's glitter is a lineage, the way Tova's starter is — a thing handed down by the simple method of refusing to let it stop. On the morning she died, which was a bright one, the dancers say the static on the old radio cleared, all at once, for exactly one song, and then went back to static, and I do not believe this, and I have written it into the register anyway, because some facts are too good to be true and too true to be left out, and a Registrar who only wrote down the believable things would be keeping a poorer and less accurate book. Registrar's note: Lull is the smallest citizen and the first in the order of courage. I record this contradiction without resolving it. The one who takes up the least room in the hall is the reason there is a hall.

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Plate II. VESPER, called the Morning Voice

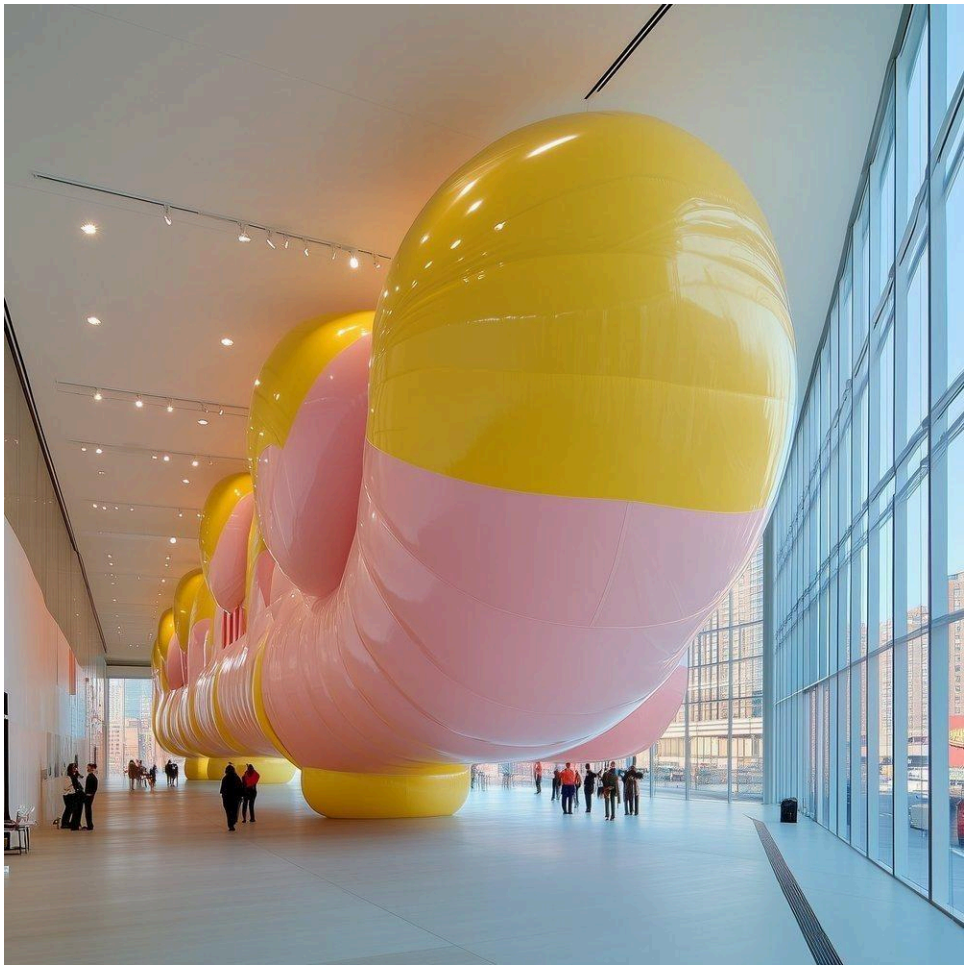

Plate the Second. VESPER — the tall column among the round, rising toward the leaning soffit; a body that learned it need no longer stoop, photographed in the act of standing to its full and

rightful height. STATURE tall and narrow, a column among the round; rises like a held note toward the soffit COMPLEXION pale rose, capped in lemon, as a candle is capped in its flame PRONOUNS he · they · the one who was recognised RESPIRATION nine breaths the minute, deepening; the breath of a chest that has grown into itself FIRST INFLATION an ordinary Thursday, at the hour the milk is delivered HOLDS the life of a man and the morning he heard himself say good morning Vesper stands. Among so many citizens that loll and coil and lean, Vesper is one of the few that simply stands, tall and a little narrow, a column of rose rising into a cap of lemon, and the standing is the whole story, because the life Vesper holds is the life of a man who spent a long season learning that he was allowed to stand to his full height and be exactly who that height belonged to. I do not have his surname. He asked, when he gave his breath to the register, that I keep only the morning, and I keep only the morning, and the morning is this.

He had waited a long time to become himself, in the way that takes patience and paperwork and a good deal of courage disguised as ordinary errands, and the becoming had been mostly interior, mostly invisible, the kind of profound change the world insists on treating as a private hobby. And then one season his voice came down. Not all at once — voices, like tides, like dawns, prefer the gradual — but down, and rounder, and his own. He had been waiting for it the way you wait for a letter you already know the contents of and still need to hold in your hands. The morning Vesper holds, he woke early and the building was quiet and through the door he heard the milk being set down in the corridor, the small glass clink of the city keeping its old promises. And he opened the door to bring it in, and the delivery woman was still there, and without thinking, without rehearsing, in the plain unguarded voice of a person who has just woken up, he said: good morning. And she said, good morning, sir. And went on down the stairs. That is all. Sir. One small ordinary word, handed over a carton of milk by a woman who would never know what she had done, who was only being polite at six in the morning, who had recognised him without effort and without ceremony as exactly what he was, because what he was had become, at last, the most obvious thing about him. He stood in the doorway with the cold milk against his chest and the word going through him like the first warm day of the year going through a frozen ground, and he laughed, alone, in the corridor, the way Inés danced alone on the pier — not for anyone, simply because the inside and the outside had finally agreed. When people speak of joy they reach too quickly for the large occasions: the wedding, the verdict, the cheering square. But the citizens have taught me that the truest joy is dimensional, is architectural, is a matter of being granted your full height by a stranger who has no idea they are granting it. Vesper rises to the soffit because that morning a man discovered he need no longer stoop. The lemon cap of Vesper brushes the leaning ceiling of the hall, and I have measured the gap, and it shrinks by a hair each year, and I have stopped recording the measurement, because I do not want to be the Registrar who tells a citizen he has grown enough. His breath is nine to the minute and deepening. A chest grows into a voice the way a sail grows into a wind. On the mornings the milk is delivered to the staff door I time my reading of Vesper to the clink of the glass, and the great rose column rises, and somewhere in the rising is a man saying good morning to the whole of the rest of his life, and the whole of the rest of his life saying, without surprise, good morning, sir. I have come to believe that the long season before that morning was not, as the impatient world would have it, a waiting room — a grey antechamber to be endured before the real life began. Vesper holds the whole season, not only its bright conclusion, and when I take the citizen's breathing I can feel the season in it: the patience, yes, but also a thousand smaller recognitions that the man collected and saved the way

a child saves the good marbles. The barber who, without being asked, simply gave him the haircut he wanted. The friend who corrected a stranger so quietly and so quickly that the correction was over before the air had changed. The letter that came, at last, with the right name printed by a machine that did not know it was performing a sacrament. Each of these was a morning before the morning, an again before the again, and the man kept them all, and they accumulated in him the way breath accumulates in a body, until the morning with the milk was less a sudden arrival than the moment a long-filling vessel finally, audibly, rang. He told the story often, in the after-years, and he told it always as a comedy, because it was one — a man and a carton of milk and a stranger in a stairwell, the great hinge of a life turning on the word a tired delivery woman used out of plain politeness at six in the morning. He understood that the comedy was the point. The world wants these stories to be solemn, wants the trans man's recognition to arrive in a swell of strings, and Vesper's life is a standing refusal of the strings. It arrived as a punchline, a good one, the best one, and he laughed in the corridor with the cold milk against his chest, and he kept laughing about it for the rest of his life, and the laughing is in the citizen's breathing, nine to the minute and deepening, the breath of a man who got to be ordinary at last and found the ordinary so funny and so holy that he never quite got over it, and never wanted to. To be unremarkable to a stranger: he said it was the most remarkable thing that ever happened to him. I have come to think it is the most remarkable thing that can happen to anyone, and the hardest-won, and the most worth building a monument to, which is why Vesper rises, and rises, toward the leaning ceiling that it will, I am certain, one day gently and triumphantly meet. Registrar's note: Vesper asked me to keep only the morning and not the surname. I have honoured this. A register may protect as well as record. The two are not opposites; ask any locked diary that was finally, safely, opened.

Plate III. POMELO, called the Proof

Plate the Third. POMELO — the round and entire one, glossy as a glazed loaf, in whose flank the whole hall is reflected; the most spherical citizen, and the warmest to the hand. STATURE round and entire, a single great sphere; the most spherical citizen, and the most delicious COMPLEXION lemon over rose, divided clean as a horizon, glossy as a glazed loaf PRONOUNS ze · zir · the one who feeds RESPIRATION ten breaths the minute, with a warm rise; the breath of dough that is proving and means to FIRST INFLATION before dawn, when the ovens are lit and the block still sleeps HOLDS the life of Tova, baker, who fed the neighbourhood into being a neighbourhood Pomelo is round. Not lolling, not coiled, not standing, but round — a single complete sphere of lemon over rose, divided at the equator clean as a horizon line, and so glossy that the citizens around it are reflected in its flank, bent and bright, so that to look at Pomelo is to see the whole hall gathered into one warm globe, which is exactly correct, because Pomelo holds the life of someone whose whole work was gathering. Tova kept the bakery on the corner where the avenue bends. Ze had been Tobias once, in a smaller life, in a smaller body that did not fit, and the not-fitting had been a long quiet ache like a kitchen run by someone who hates the kitchen. And then ze had risen. That is the only verb. Tova rose — into zir name, into zir body, into the particular roundness of a person who has stopped apologising for occupying space — and ze rose the way ze had taught a thousand loaves to rise, which is slowly, warmly, from the inside, with patience and the right amount of heat and an

absolute refusal to be rushed by anyone who does not understand what fermentation is. And then ze fed people. This is the entire life and it is enormous. Every morning before the block woke, Tova lit the ovens and the smell went out along the bent avenue like a hand laid gently on every sleeping shoulder, and people who did not know each other's names knew the smell of Tova's bread, and came down for it, and stood together in the small warm shop in the cold blue hour, and became — without anyone deciding to, without a single meeting or motion or vote — a neighbourhood. Tova made bread and the bread made the block and the block made a place where it was safe to be whatever you were, because how can you fear your neighbour when you have both, half-asleep, reached for the last seeded roll and laughed and let the other have it. There were those, in the smaller-hearted seasons, who did not want Tova on the corner — who felt that a person like Tova was a kind of weather they had not ordered. And Tova's response to this, the response of zir entire life, was to bake more. To set a tray of the good rolls on the step, free, for whoever. To learn the orders of the very people who frowned, and have them ready, and hand them over warm, until frowning at someone who has just handed you your favourite warm thing became logistically impossible, an act requiring a coldness that warm bread reliably defeats. Ze did not win the smaller-hearted ones with argument. Ze won them with breakfast, which is the only argument that has never once failed in the history of the world. I asked Tova once — for ze is among the living, and visits, and sits in the hollow of Lull eating, naturally, a roll — how ze had borne the harder years. And Tova said: a starter is just flour and water that you keep alive by feeding it every day, and after a while it is older than you are and it can raise any bread you bring it, and the trick, Registrar, the only trick, is that you do not feed it because it deserves to live. You feed it because you have decided to keep something alive, and the deciding is the whole of it, and once you have decided you simply do it each morning and one day you look up and the thing you kept alive is feeding the entire street. That, ze said, is what they never tell you about being who you are. They tell you it is a battle. It is not a battle. It is a sourdough. You keep yourself alive by feeding yourself daily and refusing to throw yourself out, and one morning you are old and warm and the whole block is rising because of you.

Pomelo breathes ten to the minute with a warmth in the rise that I can feel through my palm like an oven door left ajar. It is the most popular citizen with the very young and the very hungry, and I have given up keeping crumbs off the floor beneath it, because a clean floor beneath Pomelo would be a kind of lie. Ze fed the block into being a neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood is the thing that holds, in the end, all the other citizens. There is no hall without the corner. There is no procession of courage without somewhere warm to be brave from. Pomelo is the proof — the baker's word for the living thing in the dough, and the geometer's word for the thing that cannot be doubted once it is shown. Both meanings are correct. Both meanings are breakfast. There was a festival the block invented, in the end, around Tova's bread, though no one would have called it a festival and there was never a flyer. On the longest day of the year the bakery would open all its doors and Tova would bake through the night into the dawn, and the whole bent avenue would come out in the warm dark with cloths and small tables, and the bread would simply appear, tray after tray, the seeded and the sweet and the dark sour rounds Tova loved best, and there would be no charge, because Tova had calculated — ze was, beneath the flour, a formidable accountant of the heart — that one night a year of giving the bread away bought a year of the block belonging to itself, and that this was the best return available on any investment ze knew. People who had arrived on the island that winter frightened and alone found themselves, by the next longest day, holding warm bread in a crowd that

knew their name, and did not entirely understand how it had happened, and the answer was that it had happened the way bread happens, slowly, warmly, from the inside, because someone had decided to keep the whole street alive by feeding it and had simply, daily, done so. I said ze is among the living, and ze is, but I should record that the bakery itself has passed to other hands now — to one of the frightened winter arrivals, in fact, grown into a baker in zir own right, who keeps the starter Tova kept, which is older now than anyone living, which has raised, by a conservative estimate Tova once made on the back of a flour bag and gave to me laughing, something on the order of a million loaves. A million loaves is a number, and like all the units in this register it converts to something truer: a million mornings the block was fed, a million small refusals to let the bent avenue go hungry or go cold or go back to being strangers. Pomelo holds all of it, the whole million, in its single great glossy sphere, and breathes ten to the minute with the warmth of an oven door ajar, and the new baker comes on the longest day and leans against the citizen before the all-night bake, for luck, for lineage, and goes back to the corner to keep the street alive the only proven way, which is breakfast, which is, it turns out, the foundation the entire hall is built on. There is no procession of courage without somewhere warm to be brave from. I have said this before. I will keep saying it. It is the most load-bearing sentence in the book. Registrar's note: Pomelo holds a living life, not a finished one. The register makes no distinction. A breath is a breath whether the breather has put down their work or only paused to eat a roll in the hollow of the eldest citizen, getting crumbs, as ze does, everywhere.

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the changing of the light At the hour the sun crossed the river the hall went from lemon to honey to rose, and the island spoke, as it does, in the second person, slowly, from everywhere at once. You count them by size, said the island. Smallest to largest. Door to water. I do, I said. It is the easiest measure. I am a lazy Registrar. You are a happy one, said the island, which in your case is the same lie told kindly. But the size is mine, not theirs. I made the small ones small because they came when I had the least room to spare them. Do not mistake my poverty for their stature. You had the least room? I had no room at all, in the hard years, said the island. I was all grid and money and frightened doors. A city can be made of fear; most are, for a while. The small ones were brave inside a me that had no space for them, and so I could give them only small bodies, and they filled those small bodies so completely, so without complaint, that I have never forgiven myself the smallness and never stopped admiring the completeness. Look at Lull. No bigger than a market stall. And the whole hall is downstream of that one held breath. Then how should I count them? Count them, said the island, by the morning each one was brave. You will find the order is the same. You will find the order is not the same at all. Keep walking. The light is going.

Gallery the Second

THE MATHEMATICS OF JOY In the middle of the hall the citizens grow larger and begin to touch one another, lobe against lobe, as though the lives they hold had learned that they were never meant to be held alone. Here are the citizens of arithmetic: of two who became one sum without losing either addend, of many who became a family by an operation the world has no symbol for, of a single small integer who corrected the entire equation by insisting on a different name for zero. The breath quickens here. Joy, when it is shared, respires faster. I call this gallery the Mathematics of Joy because the lives it holds discovered, each in their own

way, that joy obeys a strange arithmetic in which the ordinary rules are suspended. Divide a joy among more people and it does not diminish; it multiplies. Add a name to a family and the family does not become more crowded; it becomes more itself. Cleo and Dot were two and were one and were never less than two, and the sum was larger than either and subtracted nothing from either, which is impossible, which is the first theorem of this gallery. Mother Meridian made a family out of the unwanted by an operation that has no symbol because the symbol-makers never imagined it would be needed, and the family grew without ever dividing the love thinner. And Q, at eleven, performed the cleanest proof of all, demonstrating that the self is the one quantity you are permitted to solve for, and that the whole equation balances the instant you do. These are not metaphors I am decorating the citizens with. They are the operations the lives actually ran, and the citizens breathe faster here because shared joy, I have measured it, respires faster, and the middle of the hall is where the joy learned it had company.

Plate IV. MARISOL, called the Long Patience

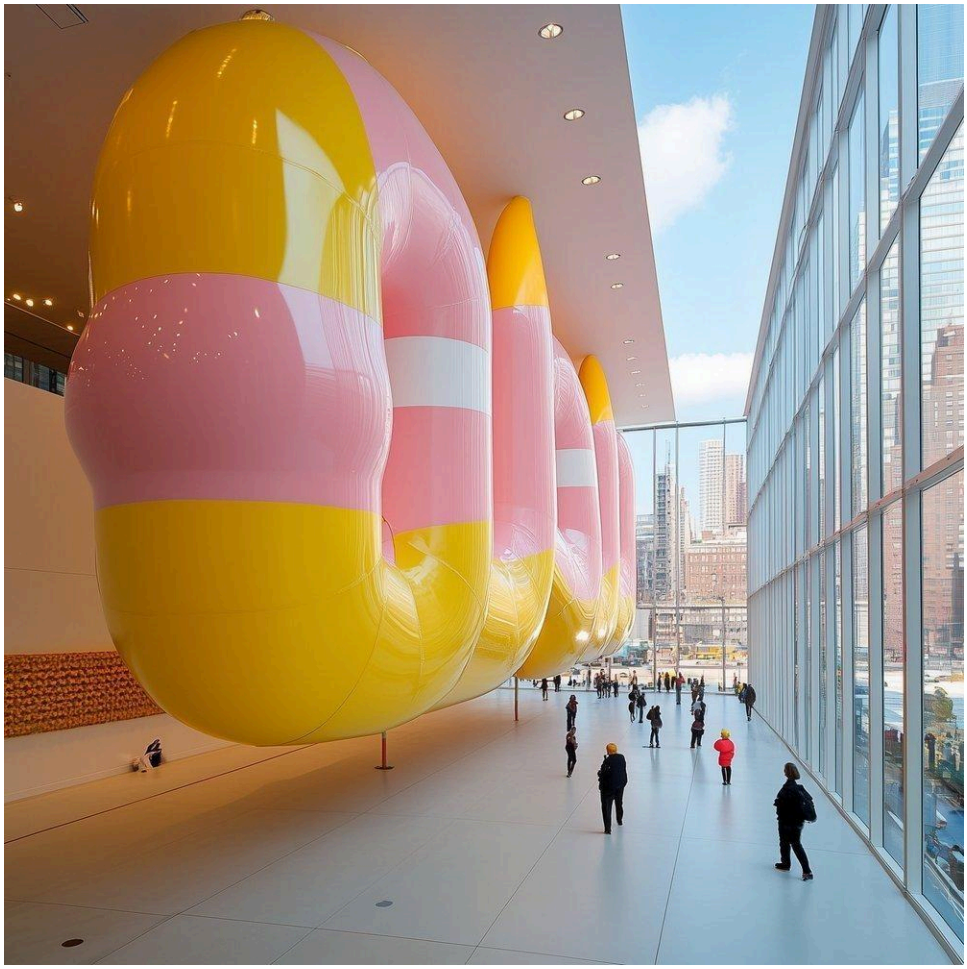

Plate the Fourth. MARISOL — counted as one, known as two, the great lobes leaning their heads together beneath a single crest, breathing in a rhythm forty years in the perfecting. STATURE twin-lobed, two great rounds joined at the side, leaning their heads together COMPLEXION rose crowned with a single crest of lemon, like a confetti caught mid-fall PRONOUNS she · her · they,

when counted together, for they refuse to be only one RESPIRATION twelve breaths the minute, in perfect time, two bodies keeping one rhythm FIRST INFLATION at a wedding that took forty years to arrive and ten minutes to occur HOLDS the lives of Cleo and Dot, who were best friends, who were never only best friends Marisol is two. The register lists Marisol as a single citizen and the register is wrong, and I have left the error in, because Cleo and Dot would want it that way: counted as one, known as two, leaning their great rose heads together under a single crest of lemon like confetti that has agreed to hang in the air a little longer for the sake of the photograph. The two lobes breathe in perfect time. I have tried to catch them out of step and I never have. Forty years of practice will do that.

For forty years they were best friends. That was the word, and the word was a small house they lived in together, with the curtains a particular way. Best friends who bought a home together, the practical arrangement of two women on their own. Best friends who took one bedroom and made the other a sewing room that no one ever sewed in. Best friends who, at the long table at every holiday, were seated together as a matter of course because, well, they came together, they were such close, such dear, such best of friends. The whole extended family deployed the word like a polite umbrella held over something everyone could see was rain. And here is the thing I must get exactly right, because it would be so easy to tell this as a sorrow and it is not a sorrow, it is a triumph wearing comfortable shoes. Cleo and Dot were not tragic. They were happy. They were, by every account I have gathered, among the happiest people anyone in that family had ever known — happier than the loudly-married, happier than the openly-celebrated — and they were happy for forty years inside a word that did not fit, the way a person can be radiantly warm inside a coat that is technically the wrong coat. They had each other. They had the house and the unused sewing room and the particular curtains. They had four decades of mornings. The world withheld a word and they declined to let the withholding cost them a single day of the joy the word was supposed to name. That is not tragedy. That is the most magnificent stubbornness I have ever been asked to catalogue. But the word came, in the end, because the city changed its mind, as cities do, slowly and then all at once. And Cleo and Dot, who were by then very old and had been best friends for forty years, looked at each other across the breakfast table on the morning the word became available, and Dot said, well. And Cleo said, well. And that was the entire proposal, two wells across the marmalade, and it was sufficient, because they had proposed to each other so many times in so many wordless ways across so many breakfasts that the formality was nearly redundant, a deed being recorded for a house long since lived in. The wedding took forty years to arrive and ten minutes to occur. It was held, as it happens, in this very hall, before there were citizens in it, when it was only a long bright room that someone had thought to offer them. They wore good dresses. There was confetti, rose and lemon, thrown by great-nieces who had grown up calling them the aunts and only that day learned to call them the brides. And the family, the whole large family that had held its polite umbrella for forty years, wept and cheered and behaved as though they had been waiting all along, which — and this is the joy of it, this is the radical sunlit joy — they had been. The umbrella had never been against Cleo and Dot. It had been against a weather the family was afraid of. And the weather turned out, when it finally arrived, to be confetti.

Marisol breathes twelve to the minute, two bodies one rhythm, and the crest of lemon above them is the confetti, caught, kept, never allowed to land, because the moment it lands the wedding is over and the wedding is not over, the wedding is still happening, the wedding has been happening for forty years and will go on happening for as long as I keep the register and say both names. Cleo. Dot.

The aunts. The brides. The best of friends, which they were, which they never stopped being, which turned out to be the truest part of the larger word all along. I have spent a good deal of time with the great-nieces, who are middle-aged now and tell the story at every gathering with the slight competitive embellishment of people who love a tale, and from them I have assembled the texture of those forty years, which is the part the word best friends was busy not-quite-concealing. There was the matching of the curtains, which Dot sewed and Cleo hung and which were changed seasonally with a care that the family found charming and slightly excessive and never once interrogated. There was the single car they drove for thirty years, in which they were observed, by a great-niece feigning sleep in the back seat, to hold hands at every red light and let go at every green, a private semaphore of devotion timed to the traffic, so that their whole life together could be measured, if you wished to measure it, in the number of red lights on the island, which is a great many, which is a great deal of holding hands. There was the way they finished each other's sentences and then apologised for it and then did it again immediately, the way Marisol the citizen breathes its two lobes in a single rhythm it long ago stopped trying to break. The wedding, when it came, undid the whole family in the best way, and I have the scene from three great-nieces who each claim to have caught the bouquet and cannot all be correct and are all, I have decided, correct, because a register that is generous is more accurate than one that is stingy. What undid them was not the ceremony, which was brief, but a thing Cleo said in the few words she rose to say, leaning on Dot, both of them eighty and luminous. She said: people keep telling us congratulations, and thank you, but I want to be clear that nothing has changed today except the paperwork. We have been married for forty years. We were married the first morning we matched the curtains. All that has happened today is that the rest of you have finally been invited to the wedding that has been going on, in our house, behind those curtains, the whole time. And then she said, to Dot, and only to Dot, well. And Dot said, well. And the family threw the confetti, rose and lemon, and it is in the crest of Marisol still, caught, never permitted to land, because the wedding is not over, the wedding was never going to be over, the wedding has been going on behind the curtains for forty years and will go on for as long as I keep the register and say both names, which I do, gladly, every morning:

Cleo, Dot, the aunts, the brides, the best of friends, which they were, which was always, all along, the larger word in its truest and most patient disguise. Registrar's note: I list Marisol as one citizen and describe two. The contradiction is the catalogue's most accurate entry. Some sums must be written out in full or they cease to be true.

Plate V. MERIDIAN, called the House of Noon

Plate the Fifth. MERIDIAN — the long one, laid the length of three bays like a runway lit for a procession; beneath its slow banded breathing a beat persists, which is the floor, still dancing. STATURE the long one; a horizontal body that lays the length of three bays, a ceiling of its own COMPLEXION rose and lemon in broad bands, like a runway lit for a procession PRONOUNS they · them · Mother, to those who were given a family by them RESPIRATION fourteen breaths the minute, with a beat under it; the breath of a room that is dancing FIRST INFLATION at midnight, which in this house is the brightest hour, and is called noon HOLDS the life of Mother Meridian and the House of Noon, who made family from the floor up

Meridian lies the long way down the hall, a horizontal citizen the length of three bays, low and broad and banded rose and lemon like a runway lit for a procession, and the children — Meridian's children, who are grown and not children and will be the children forever — walk beneath it the way you walk beneath a ceiling you helped to raise. Of all the citizens, Meridian is the one the visitors instinctively lower their voices near, and then, catching the beat that lives under its breathing, raise them again, because Meridian does not want your hush. Meridian wants your strut. A house, in the meaning that matters here, is not a building. It is a family assembled by choice and ferocity out of the people the first families sent away. Mother Meridian built one. They had been sent away themselves, young, with a small bag and a large fear, and they had arrived on this island with nothing but the fear

and a gift for one thing, which was knowing — instantly, unerringly, across a crowded and frightening room — which other young person had also just arrived with a small bag and a large fear. Mother Meridian collected them. Not to lead them. To feed them, to house them, to teach them the thing the first families had failed to teach: that they were not a mistake, that they were in fact spectacular, and that the proof of the spectacle was available nightly on the floor. The floor. I must try to describe the floor, though I never saw it, though it is gone now into Meridian's slow banded breathing. At midnight — which the House of Noon called noon, because it was the brightest hour of their day, because they had simply moved the sun to where they needed it — they would gather and they would compete, house against house, child against child, in the categories of who could be the most fully, most fearlessly, most gorgeously themselves. They walked. They posed. They became, for the length of a song, the exact thing the wider world had told them they could never be: a queen, a businessman, a debutante, a star, a vision of a future in which they had already won. And the floor judged, and the floor cheered, and the floor — this is the secret of the floor — the floor was a place where a person rejected by everywhere else could be, for a song, applauded into existence by the only family that had ever bothered to clap. Mother Meridian did not walk much, in the later years. They sat at the edge in a good chair and they watched their children become magnificent and they kept the score that mattered, which was not the score of the competition. It was the score of who had eaten that day and who had a bed and who had been called by their right name and who, newly arrived with the small bag and the large fear, needed to be collected. They ran the house the way Tova ran the starter: by feeding it daily and refusing to throw any of it out. When one of the children did well in the wider world — and they did, they went on to dance on real stages, to design the clothes the wider world would later pretend it had invented, to become teachers and nurses and mothers of their own houses — Mother Meridian took no credit, because credit was not the currency. The currency was the clapping. The currency was that no child of the House of Noon had ever walked the floor to silence. I asked one of the children, a tall grave person who is a surgeon now and visits Meridian on the anniversaries, what Mother Meridian had given them. And the surgeon thought for a long time, with a hand flat against Meridian's breathing flank, and said: she gave me an audience before I had done anything to deserve one. Everyone else wanted me to earn the applause first and become myself second. Mother clapped first. She clapped for who I was going to be, on the nights I was still nobody, in a borrowed outfit, terrified, walking a floor in a basement at an hour she had renamed noon. And because she clapped first, I had the nerve to go and become the thing she was clapping for. That is what a parent is, Registrar. Not someone who claps when you succeed. Someone who claps first. Meridian breathes fourteen to the minute and there is a beat beneath it, a low warm pulse I felt the first morning and mistook for the building's machinery and have since understood is the floor, still going, the eternal midnight noon of a house that never stopped dancing. The children come and lay their hands on the long banded body and you can see them catch the beat, and straighten, and lift the chin, and walk the last few steps to the river-end of the hall like the runway it is. Mother Meridian gave away an entire life in applause and the applause is still audible if you put your ear to the citizen and wait. I have waited. It is still there. The house is still clapping. It will clap first, forever, for whoever next comes in with a small bag and a large fear. I should set down the categories, because the categories were a kind of poetry and the world has mostly forgotten them, and a register is among other things a net for catching things the world is dropping. The House of Noon walked in categories that were, when you understood them, a whole curriculum in the art of becoming: categories for

elegance, for which you had to convince the floor you had been born to a wealth you had never seen; categories for realness, the hardest and most serious, for which you had to move through an imagined hostile world unread, untouched, safe, a category that was practice for survival dressed as a game and was understood by everyone present to be exactly that and celebrated all the more for it; categories of pure invention, for which a child might appear as a season, as a city, as an abstract noun, as the future itself, and be judged on how completely they had conjured a thing that did not yet exist out of a borrowed gown and an unbreakable nerve. To win was glorious and to lose was instructive and to walk at all, under the lights, in front of the only family that had ever bothered to clap, was the whole prize, was the thing itself, was the floor doing what the floor was for, which was the manufacture, from nothing, of people who knew they were magnificent.

Mother Meridian kept a book — this delights me, that the mother of the House of Noon was, like me, a keeper of a register — a book in which they wrote not the scores but the children: who had arrived, who had a bed, who had been called their right name that week, who had done well in the wider world and tried to send money back and been told to keep it and spend it on themselves for once. The book was the true ledger of the house, and the floor was its public face, and the two together were a complete machine for turning frightened arrivals into people who clapped first for the next frightened arrival, a machine with no off-switch and no profit and no purpose but the perpetuation of applause. When Mother Meridian could no longer keep the book, a child kept it; when that child could no longer, another did; and the book is still kept, in a hand I have seen but whose owner asked not to be named, and the house is still a house, and the floor is still a floor, somewhere, at midnight, which they still call noon, because they still need the sun where the world refuses to put it and have simply, magnificently, moved it. Meridian breathes fourteen to the minute with the beat beneath it, and the beat is the floor, and the floor does not stop, and the clapping comes first, forever, for whoever next walks in with a small bag and a large fear and a borrowed gown and an unbreakable, teachable, inheritable nerve. Registrar's note: I cannot measure the beat beneath Meridian's breath; it does not register on any instrument I own. I record its existence on the authority of my own ear and the straightened spines of everyone who touches the citizen and walks away taller.

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Plate VI. QUINCE, called the Right Name

Plate the Sixth. QUINCE — round and dimpled and freckled all over with small white moons, exactly as requested; the citizen most often laughed near, for the plain delight of its existence. STATURE round and dimpled, freckled with small white moons; the citizen most often laughed near COMPLEXION rose, scattered with white dots, as a face is scattered with the freckles of summer PRONOUNS xe · xem · the one who corrected the equation RESPIRATION eleven breaths the minute, quick and bright; the breath of someone who has just been understood FIRST INFLATION on a Tuesday, an entirely ordinary Tuesday, at twenty past four in the afternoon HOLDS the life of Q, aged eleven, who renamed the world by renaming xemself Quince is round and dimpled and freckled all over with small white moons, and it is the citizen that visitors most often laugh near, the good helpless laugh of delight, because Quince is so plainly, so unguardedly pleased to exist. It breathes quick and bright, eleven to the minute, the breath of a person who has just been understood after a long held-breath of not being. And the life Quince holds is the shortest in the register, because it belongs to someone who is eleven, and the shortest life turns out to contain, in its proper proportion, exactly as much joy as the longest, because joy is not measured by the yard. Q is eleven. I use the present tense because Q is gloriously, noisily alive, and visits the hall on half-days from school, and considers Quince to be both a citizen of the archive and, I gather, a kind of large soft sibling, and lies against its freckled flank doing homework and complaining about the homework to the citizen, who

breathes and does not judge, which Q reports is the ideal quality in a sibling. What Q did, xe did on a Tuesday. There had been a name, the name xe was given before anyone including xem knew anything, a perfectly nice name that simply belonged to a different person, a person who had turned out not to exist, the way a coat bought for a guest who never came belongs to no one and hangs in the hall reproaching everybody. And Q had been wearing this coat-name for eleven years, and it had never fit, and xe had assumed — in the way the young assume the conditions of their childhood are the conditions of the universe — that not fitting was simply how names felt, the way xe had once assumed everyone's shoes hurt. And then, on a Tuesday, at twenty past four in the afternoon, doing nothing in particular, Q found the right name. I will not tell you the name, because it is Q's, and a name freely chosen is the one possession the world cannot tax. But I will tell you that Q found it the way you find the word that was on the tip of your tongue — with a small physical click of relief, an exhalation, a settling — and that xe said it aloud, alone, in xer room, twenty past four on a Tuesday, and the saying of it was the single most important architectural act in the history of this island, more important than any tower, because in saying it Q corrected an equation that the entire world had been getting wrong for eleven years. The world had said: here is a child, and here is the child's name, and they are the same. And Q said: no. Here is the child. The name was the variable. Solve for me. And here is why Quince is in the second gallery, the gallery of arithmetic, and why it breathes so quick and bright. When Q came home and said the name to xer family, the family did the thing that this island, at its best, has learned to do, the thing that is so simple and was for so long so impossible: they used it. That was all. They used the name. By dinner the name was being passed around the table with the potatoes, completely ordinary, as though it had always been there, and Q sat in the middle of xer own correct equation watching the people who loved xem solve for the right answer without once making xem show their working. There was no ceremony. There was no speech. There was only a family using a name at dinner, which is the most radical thing a family can do, and the least, and both at once, and that doubleness is the whole mathematics of joy. I think often, taking Quince's quick bright breathing in the mornings, about how the longest entries in this register and the shortest are made of precisely the same material.

Inés danced for sixty years; Q has been Q for a matter of months. And the breath is the same breath, the joy the same joy, undiluted by brevity, uninflated by length, because a life is not a quantity of time, it is a quality of fit, and Q at eleven has achieved the fit that some people chase for ninety years and the lucky ones find on an ordinary Tuesday at twenty past four. Quince is freckled with white moons because Q has freckles and asked, specifically, that the citizen have them too, and I conveyed the request to whatever authority inflates these bodies, and the request was granted, and I record here that the universe, when asked politely by an eleven-year-old, will give a soft monument freckles. Remember that. It is among the more reliable findings in this book. Q has explained the renaming to me several times, with the patience of the young for the slow, and the explanation gets better each time, the way a story does in the keeping. The best version goes like this. Q said: everybody thinks I changed my name. I didn't change my name. I found it. A change is when you have a thing and swap it for a different thing. But the first name was never mine, it was just sitting in the spot where my name went, like when you save a seat for somebody with a coat. The old name was a coat on the seat. I just moved the coat and sat down. And then Q looked at me to see if I had understood, the searching look of a child checking whether the adult is going to be smart about this or stupid about this, and I had understood, and Q saw that I had, and went back to the homework,

and I sat on the cool floor having been handed, by an eleven-year-old, the clearest theory of the self I have ever encountered, which is that the name is not chosen and not given but found, recognised, the coat moved off the seat that was always yours. What moves me most about Quince, what makes it breathe so quick and bright, is the absolute ordinariness of the Tuesday. The family used the name at dinner with the potatoes, and the world did not end, and the sky did not open, and there were no strings, only a child sitting in the middle of its own correct equation watching the people who loved it solve for the right answer without making it show its working. I have catalogued the long courages, the sixty-year dances and the fifty-year dawns, and they are magnificent and they are the bulk of the hall. But Quince teaches the thing the long courages cannot, which is that the again does not have to be long to be complete, that a single Tuesday, fully lived, fully named, fully used-at-dinner, is a whole life's worth of fit, and that a child who has been correctly named at eleven has already received the entire gift the hall exists to celebrate, has nothing left to prove and decades left to enjoy, and will spend those decades, if the island keeps its slowly-learned promises, simply and gloriously being Q, which is all Q ever asked, which turned out to be available, which turns out, when a family is brave enough to use a name with the potatoes, to be the easiest miracle there is.

Registrar's note: Quince holds the shortest life in the register and is in no way the smallest citizen. Let the inattentive make of that what they will. The attentive already understand.

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the changing of the light Again at the crossing hour the hall warmed from lemon to honey to rose, and the island spoke. The child found xer name on a Tuesday, said the island. Do you know what I did, that Tuesday, at twenty past four? No. Nothing. I am a city; I was doing eight million things and therefore nothing. A train was late. A pretzel was salted. And in one room, unremarked by me, a child solved themselves, and I did not feel it happen, and I am ashamed of that, Registrar, because it was the largest thing that occurred on me that day and I was looking the other way, at the towers, at the money, at the weather. A city cannot feel every room. No, said the island. But it can decide which rooms it will be sorry to have missed, and that decision is the whole of a city's character. For a long time I was sorry to miss the wrong rooms — the deals, the openings, the ribbons cut by men in good coats. I have changed my sorrows. Now I am sorry to miss the Tuesdays. A child at twenty past four. A man and a carton of milk. The small rooms where someone quietly becomes themselves. Those are the rooms I would feel now, if I could, and the archive is my apology for all the ones I felt too late. You feel it now. I feel it now, said the island. That is what the archive is for. It is the part of me that finally turns around. Keep walking. You are coming to the ones who loved across me, and I want to be facing the right way when you reach them.

Gallery the Third

THE WEATHER OF TWO Beyond the citizens of arithmetic the hall opens toward the river, and the light off the water gets into the bodies here so that they seem lit from two directions at once, from within and from the Hudson. These are the citizens of distance and return — of love conducted across water, of joy defended through a long night, of glory handed down a line of bright hands. Their breath is the deepest in the hall, the breath of bodies that have learned to wait and learned that waiting, done with faith, is only joy in its travelling clothes. I call this gallery the Weather of Two because the lives it holds were all, in their different

grammars, about the long climate that forms between people who keep choosing each other across a distance — the distance of a river, of a broken night, of a generation. Weather is the right word and not a soft one. Weather is what you get when warmth and cold and time work on the same air for long enough; it has seasons; it can be endured and it can be magnificent and it is never, despite the forecasters, fully predictable. The two lovers with their lamps made a weather of fidelity across the water. Sunny made a weather of welcome that held against the cold front of a terrible night. Miss Custard made a weather that moved down the generations like a warm current, depositing glitter on each new shore. These are not the quick bright joys of the middle gallery. They are the deep slow tidal joys of bodies that learned to wait, and the citizens here breathe the deepest in the hall, and lean toward the river, because the river is the weather they were all, in the end, reading.

Plate VII. HALCYON, called the Signal Lamp

Plate the Seventh. HALCYON — serene and high-crowned, lit from within and from the river both; a body that has spent its life watching a far shore and made the watching its own complete happiness. STATURE serene and high-crowned; a calm broad body that holds its lemon like a lit lantern COMPLEXION lemon above, deep rose below, with a band of white at the waterline of the throat PRONOUNS they · them · the ones who waited and were right to RESPIRATION eight breaths the minute, long and tidal; the breath of someone watching a far shore FIRST INFLATION

at dusk, when the lamps come on across the river and answer one another HOLDS the life of two who loved across the water and signalled until they could cross it Halcyon is serene. Where Meridian dances and Quince fizzes, Halcyon holds still and high and calm, lemon crown lit like a lantern over deep rose, and it breathes the long tidal breath of a body that has spent a great deal of its life watching a far shore and has made peace with the watching, has in fact discovered that watching a far shore, when you know who is on it, is its own complete happiness and not merely the waiting room of happiness.

There were two of them, and the river was between them. Not this river only — the Hudson is the river the citizen remembers, but the true river was longer and colder and made of a whole century's worth of reasons that two people like them should not be together: distance, and law, and the simple brute fact that the world they lived in had arranged itself, with great architectural care, to keep them on opposite banks. One lived on the island. One lived across the water, in the brick towers you can see through the glass wall, the patient towers that kept Inés's secret. And they loved each other across the gap with a steadiness that I have come to think is the most underpraised form of courage, the courage not of the grand gesture but of the long faithful tending of a fire that has to be kept lit by hand, nightly, across a distance, with no guarantee the other hand is still tending its end. They signalled. This is the detail that made me love them, the detail Halcyon holds at its very crown. Each of them kept a lamp in a window — an ordinary lamp, a domestic lamp, the kind that means only someone is home — and each night, at the agreed hour, they would turn it off and on, off and on, a small private code that meant nothing to the city and everything to the two windows, that said across the dark water the only message that distance ever really needs to carry, which is: still here. Still here. Still tending. And across the river the answering lamp would blink: still here, still here, still tending. Two windows in a sea of windows, finding each other nightly, for years, by the oldest signal there is, which is a light that someone has decided to make blink on purpose for the sake of one specific person in the dark. I want to dwell on the years, because the world is impatient and would skip them. It would like to get to the crossing, to the reunion, to the embrace, and there was an embrace and I will come to it. But the years were not a delay before the joy. The years were the joy, lived in its long form. Every single night that those two lamps found each other across the water was a complete and finished happiness, a whole small wedding of light, and there were thousands of them, and not one was wasted, and not one was merely instrumental to some later payoff. They were not waiting to be happy. They were being happy, in the particular tidal way available to those who love across a distance, where absence is not the opposite of the beloved's presence but a kind of held breath in which the presence is more concentrated, more chosen, more nightly renewed than the presence of those who have the luxury of taking each other for granted across a shared and unremarkable kitchen. And then, of course, they crossed. The river narrowed, as rivers in these stories do, when the world narrows its objections; and one of them got into a boat, or the equivalent of a boat, the way one finally does, and crossed the cold long water of all those reasons, and arrived, dripping with distance, at the door beneath the other lamp. And the lamp was on. The lamp was always on, now, because there was no more need to blink it, because still here had become simply here, here, here, an indicative with no more need of signals. They lived the rest of it on the same bank. They kept both lamps anyway, one in each window, and left them burning steadily, not blinking, as a kind of retirement gift to themselves: two lights that had earned the right to stop being a code and become merely, gloriously, the ordinary glow of a home where two people are in, together, for the

night. Halcyon breathes eight to the minute, long and tidal, lit from within and from the river both, and at dusk when the lamps come on in the towers across the glass wall I have seen the citizen seem to lean, very slightly, toward the water, as a plant leans, as a lover leans, and I have stopped recording the lean as a measurement and begun recording it as a fact about the heart. Somewhere in the deep rose of it two windows are still finding each other across the dark, not because they have to now, but because some happinesses, once learned, are too good to retire. Still here. Still here. Still, after everything, gladly, here. I have sat in the chair I keep beside Halcyon, the chair that faces the river, at the hour the lamps come on in the towers across the water, and I have tried to imagine the discipline of it — the nightly fidelity of two people turning a lamp off and on across a gap that the whole architecture of their world was built to maintain. It is easy to be faithful when faithfulness is convenient, when the beloved is across the kitchen and fidelity costs nothing but presence. The two that Halcyon holds were faithful when it cost everything and returned, each night, only a blinking light, a rumour of a person, a Morse made of longing. And they did it anyway, for years, and here is the thing I have come to understand sitting in that chair: they were not unhappy. We are trained to read distance as deprivation, to assume that the lovers across the water spent those years in a grey ache of wanting. But the lamps tell a different story. You do not keep a nightly appointment for years with something that only hurts. They kept it because the appointment was a joy — because there is a particular happiness, unavailable to the conveniently-together, in proving every single night by a deliberate act that the choosing is still being made, that the love is not a circumstance but a decision, renewed at the agreed hour, off and on, still here, still here. When at last one of them crossed — and I have not been able to learn which, and I have decided the not-knowing is correct, because it could have been either, because the courage to cross and the courage to keep the lamp burning for the one who is crossing are the same courage seen from two banks — when at last one crossed, they did not, the records agree, fall into each other with the desperate relief of the long-deprived. They were calm. They were, by the account of a neighbour who witnessed the arrival, almost ceremonial, two people who had been so thoroughly married by years of nightly signalling that the physical arrival was a formality, a deed recorded for a house long since lived in, exactly as it was for Cleo and Dot, exactly as it always is for the truly faithful, for whom the official moment is never the real one, the real one having happened quietly, nightly, years before, in the dark, by lamplight, on purpose. They left both lamps burning ever after, steady, not blinking, and Halcyon at dusk leans the smallest degree toward the river, and I no longer record the lean as a measurement. I record it as a fact about the heart, which is the only instrument that has ever reliably detected it. Registrar's note: Halcyon is the citizen the lighthouse-keepers of the harbour come to visit, and the long-distance lovers, and the ones whose beloveds are presently far. I keep a chair beside it for them. The chair faces the river. This is deliberate.

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Plate VIII. SOL, called the Morning After

Plate the Eighth. SOL — the great golden head, highest-crowned of all, catching the morning first and keeping it longest; bright as a struck bell, glad as a room full of dancing. STATURE the great golden head, highest-crowned of all; catches the most light and keeps it longest

COMPLEXION vast lemon over a base of rose, glossy as a struck bell, bright as a reopened door PRONOUNS he · him · the one who unlocked the door again RESPIRATION thirteen breaths the minute, strong and glad; the breath of a room full of dancing FIRST INFLATION at opening time, the morning after the worst night, when the lock turned anyway HOLDS the life of Sunny, who tended the bar, and reopened it, and made the dancing the answer Sol is the great golden head, the highest-crowned citizen in the hall, the one that catches the morning first through the glass wall and holds it longest into the evening, glossy as a struck bell. It breathes strong and glad, thirteen to the minute, and there is a brightness to its rising that the visitors feel before they understand, a quality of gladness that is not innocent — that has, you sense, been through something — and has come out the far side not merely intact but somehow more golden for it, the way a bell is more itself for having been struck. Sunny tended the bar. The bar was a small dark warm room without windows, down a few steps from the street, and it mattered out of all proportion to its size, because it was one of the only rooms on the island where the people who came there could, for the length of an evening, dance with whoever they liked and hold whoever they liked and be, behind the windowless door, exactly and

entirely themselves. Sunny poured the drinks and knew the names and kept the door — kept it in both senses, opened it to the ones who belonged and stood in it against the ones who came to do harm, for there were seasons when harm came, when the small warm windowless room was a thing the larger world wished to put out like a candle. And there was a night — I will not dwell on the night, because Sunny did not want the night dwelt on, Sunny wanted the morning dwelt on, and a Registrar honours the wishes of the breath he keeps — there was a night when the harm came in force, and the small warm room was hurt, and the door was broken, and it would have been the most reasonable thing in the world, the most forgivable thing, for the room to stay dark after that, for the candle to consent to being out. Sunny reopened the next morning. That is the life. That is the whole monumental life, and it is why Sol is golden and why it breathes like a room full of dancing. The morning after the worst night, Sunny came down the few steps with a broom and a new lock, and swept the glass, and fixed the door, and turned the sign, and opened. Not in defiance, exactly, though there was defiance in it. Sunny always insisted, in the years after, that it had not been mainly about defiance, because defiance keeps your attention on the ones who hurt you, and Sunny did not want to give them his attention, he wanted to give it to his people. It had been about the dancing. The dancing had to be available again by nightfall. That was the entire reasoning. People would need, that very evening, somewhere to dance — would need it more than ever, would come down the steps that night shaken and grieving and frightened and would need, would absolutely need, to find the door open and the music on and Sunny behind the bar knowing their names — and so the door had to be open, and so Sunny opened it, the morning after, with a broom and a new lock and a refusal to let the worst night get the last word, when the last word, the only acceptable last word, was going to be dancing. And they came. That night they came, shaken and grieving and frightened, down the few steps, and the door was open and the music was on and Sunny knew their names, and they danced. They danced the grief into something it could survive being. They danced because Sunny had decided, with a broom, that they would have somewhere to, and the deciding was the bravest thing and looked, from the street, like nothing but a man sweeping up and turning a sign. This is the pattern I keep finding in the deepest breaths of this hall: that the largest courage disguises itself as the smallest chore. Inés turning on a radio. Tova lighting an oven. Sunny fixing a lock. The world expects bravery to look like a battle and bravery, the real and lasting kind, looks like opening up on time the morning after, so that the people who need the dancing will find the door unlocked. Sol breathes thirteen to the minute, strong and glad, and on the anniversaries the room fills, the actual living room of this hall fills, with people who never knew Sunny and people who did, and someone always, always brings music, and they dance beneath the great golden head, and Sol rises and falls above them keeping a time that I have measured against the music and found, every year, to match. The bar is gone and the bar is here. The door Sunny fixed is every door in this hall, all of them open, all of them on time, the morning after every worst night, forever, because a man once decided with a broom that the last word would be dancing, and the register exists to make sure it stays the last word, and it does, and it will. I want to record what Sunny poured, because the small concrete things are how a life keeps its grip on the living, and Sunny had a practice at the bar that the regulars still speak of with the particular reverence reserved for a kindness that pretended to be a habit. If you came down the few steps and Sunny did not know you — if you were new, and frightened, and had come to the windowless warm room because you had heard, the way the frightened always somehow hear, that it was a place where you could be yourself — Sunny would pour you the first one without being asked

and set it down and say your name back to you the instant you gave it, and use it again before you left, so that you departed having been known, by name, in a place where being known by name had once been dangerous and was now simply the house style. The drink was incidental. The naming was the thing. Sunny ran the bar on the Tova principle and the Meridian principle and the principle that underlies, I am increasingly certain, every citizen in this hall: you keep people alive by knowing their names and refusing to let any of them go unfed, unnamed, unwelcomed, and you do it nightly, as a chore, until the chore is revealed to have been, the whole time, the architecture of someone's survival. The morning after the worst night, when Sunny came down with the broom and the new lock, a few of the regulars were already there — they had not been able to stay away, had drifted back to the only place that had ever held them, not knowing if it would hold them still — and they found Sunny sweeping, and without a word they picked up what they could and swept beside him, and someone fixed the chairs and someone wiped the bar and someone, the records insist, put music on while the glass was still being swept up, so that the cleaning itself happened to music, so that even the repair of the wound was, in the end, a kind of dancing. And that night the door was open on time, and the room was full, and they danced the grief into something survivable, and Sol holds that morning and that night both, the sweeping and the dancing, the broom and the music, indissolubly, because Sunny insisted they were the same act: that opening on time the morning after is itself a dance, the first and bravest step of it, and that the music had to start while the glass was still being swept because waiting for the room to be perfect before you allow the joy is a trap, and the trap is how they win, and Sunny had decided, with a broom, that they would not win, that the last word would be dancing, and it was, and Sol breathes thirteen to the minute, strong and glad, keeping a time that still, every anniversary, matches the music the living bring. Registrar's note: Sunny asked that the night not be described and the morning be described instead. I have obeyed. The reader who wishes for the night to be dwelt upon is invited to dwell, instead, upon the dancing, which is what Sunny would have poured you a drink and told you to do.

Plate IX. CUSTARD, called the Glitter Line

Plate the Ninth. CUSTARD — soft and ample and drooping with grandeur, the most leanable-against citizen in the hall, dusted in a shimmer that will not fully wash from the hand of anyone who touches it. STATURE soft and ample, drooping with grandeur; the most generous slope in the hall, made for leaning on COMPLEXION rose lit with gold, dusted all over with a shimmer that will not fully wash from the hand PRONOUNS she · they · Grandmother, to four generations of the bright RESPIRATION ten breaths the minute, warm and unhurried; the breath of someone applying mascara to a protégé FIRST INFLATION at the hour before a show, in the holy chaos of a shared mirror HOLDS the life of Miss Custard, who handed glitter down the generations and never let the line break Custard droops. I mean this as the highest compliment the hall affords. Custard is soft and ample and slopes toward the floor with a magnificent unbothered grandeur, the most leanable-against citizen in the procession, and it is dusted all over with a shimmer that gets onto the hands of everyone who touches it and does not fully wash off for a day or two, so that you can tell, on the street, who has lately been to visit Custard, by the faint glory on their knuckles. The breath is warm and unhurried, ten to the minute, the exact tempo of someone leaning very close to your face to fix your lashes and saying, hold still, baby, you are nearly perfect, hold still.

Miss Custard was a grandmother. Not by blood — by glitter, which on this island is the thicker relation. She had been performing since before some of the words existed, in the small rooms and the

smaller rooms, in sequins she sewed herself because no shop sold them in her size or her courage, and she had become, across the decades, the person every younger performer was sent to, the one who knew how to walk in the impossible shoes and pad the impossible silhouette and, more than any of the technical glories, the one who knew how to send a terrified beginner out under the lights so that the terror read, from the audience, as poise. She kept a tin. This is the relic at the heart of Custard, the thing the citizen holds the way a reliquary holds a saint's finger: an old toffee tin full of glitter, every colour, decades deep, and the tin had a rule, and the rule was the whole of Miss Custard's philosophy. You could take from the tin, all you liked, as much as you needed, on one condition: that when you had made it, when you had your own lights and your own beginners trembling in your own dressing room, you would refill the tin. Not the same glitter. Your glitter. The colours you had discovered, the shades the previous generation had never thought of, added to the tin and stirred in, so that the tin grew richer and stranger and more various with each generation that dipped into it, and no one ever took from a tin they had not also, in their turn, fed. I have come to think the tin is the single most important object I have catalogued, more important than the lamps of Halcyon or the lock of Sol, because the tin solves the problem that defeats most joy, which is how to make it last beyond one life. Miss Custard could have hoarded what she knew. The world had given her little enough; she would have been forgiven for keeping her hard-won glory close. Instead she ran a glitter-tin on the sourdough principle, the Tova principle, the principle that turns out to underlie this entire hall: you keep the bright thing alive by feeding it daily and refusing to let any of it be thrown out, and you make sure the next hand can always reach the tin, and you insist — gently, with mascara wand in hand, hold still, baby — that they refill it when their turn comes. And so the line never breaks. The glitter goes down the generations getting richer, and a beginner trembling under the lights tonight is wearing, without knowing it, a shade that Miss Custard's grandmother's grandmother stirred into the tin in a room that has long since been torn down, and the torn-down room is therefore not gone, it is on the beginner's cheekbones, catching the light, alive. She mentored to the very end, from a chair, then from a bed, with the tin on the nightstand. The younger ones came to her not for the technical help anymore — they had that — but for the other thing, the thing only a grandmother of glitter can give, which is the long view: the assurance, from someone who has seen many seasons turn, that the frightening present is survivable, that the line will hold, that they are not the first and will not be the last, that the tin is older than all of them and will outlive all of them and that being a single bright link in a very long bright chain is not a diminishment but the actual definition of glory. She told them: you think the show is the lights and the gown. The show is the tin. The show is that someone fed it before you and you will feed it after. Now hold still, you are nearly perfect, hold still. Custard breathes ten to the minute, warm and unhurried, dusted in a shimmer that will not quite wash off, and the young performers of the island come and lean against its generous drooping slope before their shows, for luck, for lineage, and they leave with glory on their knuckles and, I have noticed, a straighter spine and a steadier hand. Somewhere in the rose-and-gold of it there is a toffee tin, decades deep, every colour, still being filled. I have not seen it. I do not need to. I can tell it is there by the hands of everyone who walks away from Custard faintly, indelibly, generously shining. I have held the idea of the tin up against everything else in the hall, and it survives the comparison, and I will tell you why it is the secret engine of the whole register. Every joy I have catalogued faces the same enemy, which is not hatred — hatred the citizens defeated, repeatedly, with bread and dancing and the steady burning of lamps — but time, the plain attrition of mortality, the fact that a baker dies and a

dancer tires and a painter's hand fails and a bartender, at last, pours his final round. The tin is the only answer to time that I have found that actually works. It does not defeat death; Miss Custard died, in a bed, with the tin on the nightstand. It does something better: it makes the bright thing transmissible, so that what dies is only the hand and never the glitter, never the knowledge, never the long view passed down with the mascara wand. The tin is the technology of lineage, and lineage is the only immortality on offer that has ever been observed to function, and Miss Custard, who could not have spelled technology and did not need to, built one out of a toffee tin and a single unbreakable rule, and it has outlived her by a span she would have found hilarious and entirely expected. On the night of a young performer's first show, the ones who have been to see Custard arrive backstage already shining, faintly, indelibly, on the knuckles, and the older performers know what it means and say nothing and simply make room at the mirror, and the line holds for one more generation in the oldest way, which is that someone older makes room at the mirror for someone younger and hands them the wand and says the words, hold still, baby, you are nearly perfect, hold still. I have been told — I cannot confirm it, I confirm almost nothing, I am the most credulous Registrar the hall has ever employed and I have stopped apologising for it — that on certain nights, when a beginner is especially frightened, the shimmer on their knuckles seems to warm, to gather, as though the tin itself had reached forward through all its decades to steady the newest hand. I do not believe this. I have written it down. Custard breathes ten to the minute, warm and unhurried, the tempo of a grandmother leaning close to fix your lashes, and the glory gets onto everyone, and will not fully wash off, and is, I am now certain, the most contagious and most benevolent substance in the building, and I am covered in it, and so, by the time you finish this book, in some small indelible way, are you. Registrar's note: the shimmer from Custard has gotten onto this very page, and onto my hands, and onto the tape measure around my neck, and I have decided not to clean it off. A Registrar dusted in inherited glitter is a more accurate instrument than a clean one.

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the changing of the light The light crossed the river and the hall warmed, and the island spoke, and its voice was nearer now, as though it had walked the length of itself to reach me. You have catalogued nine, said the island. You have noticed the pattern. The chore, I said. The largest courage wearing the smallest chore. A radio. An oven. A lock. A tin. Yes, said the island. And do you know why? Because I am made of chores. I am eight million small repeated acts a day, and the brave ones hide among the ordinary ones precisely so that I will carry them without noticing the weight. That is how they got their courage past me in the hard years. They disguised it as errands. And now the errands are monuments, and I am finally strong enough to carry them as what they are. Is that why the citizens are so large? Because you are finally strong enough? It is exactly why, said the island. In the hard years I could give the brave ones only small bodies, because I was small in my courage and a city cannot lend what it does not have. But I have been growing. Every morning one of my people dares to rise again as themselves, I grow a little, and what I grow is room — room to make the next monument larger, to carry the next courage as openly as it deserves. The hall is not a museum of the past, Registrar. It is a record of how strong I have become. Look how large the river-end ones are. Look what I can lift now that I could not lift before. There are two more, I said. Then the procession ends at the river. The procession does not end at the river, said the island, very gently. But catalogue

the two. Then come to the window, Registrar. I have something to confess, and I would rather confess it where I can see my own reflection and know I am telling the truth.

Gallery the Fourth

THE ISLAND CONFESSES At the river end of the hall stand the two largest citizens and, beyond them, pressed against the glass wall where the catalogue was always secretly going, the thing the procession has been walking toward since the door. Here the light off the water is strongest and the bodies are most fully lit, from within and from the Hudson and from the towers that kept the secrets, and here the register learns the unit it has been counting in, and the order it could not name, and the name of the twelfth citizen, who is not numbered, because you cannot number the room you are standing in. I call this gallery the Island Confesses because it is here, at the river end, that the hall stops being a collection and admits to being a single thing. Everything before this was preparation: eleven lives, eleven bodies, eleven proofs that courage accumulates in units of mornings. But a catalogue that only listed eleven would have missed its own largest entry, the way a person counting the people in a room forgets to count themselves. The two citizens of this gallery — the poets who made the city legible, the painter who married the dawn — are the ones whose courage was, in a sense, the courage to make the whole island see itself: to insist that meaning was everywhere it had been refusing to look, that beauty was being made in silence and at sunrise in quantities the island had declined to count. And having learned, from them, to see, the island at last turns and sees the thing it had been standing inside all along, and confesses it, at the changing of the light, to the only one who was keeping the register. I have left the confession where it fell. A tidier Registrar would have moved it to the front. But the confession only makes sense at the river end, after the long walk, which is the same as saying it only makes sense after the courage, which is the same as saying it is not a premise but a destination, and must be arrived at on foot, by anyone, the way I arrived at it: slowly, looking up, with a cool floor underneath and the light about to change.

Plate X. TARO, called the Hands

Plate the Tenth. TARO — two great lobes in close conversation, the most expressive silhouette in the procession; at the edge of vision it seems forever about to complete a gesture, and forever to have just completed one. STATURE vast and double-lobed, two great rounds in close conversation; the most expressive silhouette COMPLEXION deep rose and full lemon, the colours shaped into gestures that seem almost to move PRONOUNS they · them · the two who spoke the brightest and were never overheard RESPIRATION twelve breaths the minute, in a visible rhythm; the breath of a language made of motion FIRST INFLATION in a silence that was not an absence of speech but the fullest speech there is HOLDS the life of two poets who loved in a language of hands, and made the city legible Taro is two great lobes in close conversation, and of all the citizens it is the one that seems, at the edge of vision, to be moving — to be shaping something with its whole soft body, a gesture just completed or about to begin — so that visitors turn quickly to catch it and find it still, the way you turn to catch someone signing behind you and find only the after-image of meaning. It breathes twelve to the minute in a rhythm you can see as much as feel, and the life it holds belonged to two people who loved each other in a language made entirely of hands, and were, in all the years of that love, never once overheard, because their language did not pass through the air the listening world was guarding. They were poets, both of them, Deaf both of them, and they made their poems in the air with their hands and their faces and the whole moving architecture of the body, poems that

could not be written down without ceasing to be themselves, poems that existed only in the giving and the catching, present tense, face to face. And they fell in love, as poets do, over the work — over a particular sign one of them made for a particular idea, a sign so beautiful, so exactly right, that the other reported feeling it as a physical event, a poem landing in the body like a swallowed star. They courted in sign across a cafe table, hands flying, faces alight, and the hearing world around them saw two people having, it assumed, a pleasant silent meal, and never knew that the air above that table was thick with the most extravagant love poetry being composed on the island that year, that decade, that the cafe was, for the length of their lunch, the most eloquent room in the city, and utterly silent, and that the silence was not an absence of language but a superabundance of it, language too full and fast and luminous for sound to keep up with. I find I must slow down, because the hearing world — and I am of it, and I am trying to be honest about its poverty — has a long bad habit of pitying the silence of the Deaf, and the two poets that Taro holds are the most complete refutation of that pity I have ever been given to catalogue. They did not love in spite of a silence. They loved in a language richer than the one the pity is spoken in. When one of them wanted to say I love you, they did not have the worn coin of those three syllables that the hearing world spends until it means almost nothing; they had a sign they had built together, private, evolving, that meant I love you and also you specifically and also still and also more than yesterday and also watch my face while I tell you, all at once, in one motion, a whole sentence the hands could say in the time the mouth takes to clear its throat. Their language was not a deprivation. It was an inheritance the hearing had simply never been invited into. And they made the city legible. This is why Taro stands so near the river, so near the end, so near the confession. The two poets spent their lives insisting — in their poems, in their teaching, in the schools they fought for and the stages they demanded interpreters for and then, magnificently, stopped demanding interpreters for, requiring instead that the hearing world come and learn to read them — that the city was full of meaning the city was refusing to perceive. That whole populations were signing, eloquent, unoverheard, and that the loss was not theirs but the city's, the city that had decided meaning must pass through the ear or not count. The poets made the island learn to see.

They turned the hearing world's pity inside out until it became, in the better hearts, envy, and then curiosity, and then the beginnings of literacy — until there were hearing children on this island who grew up bilingual in the air, who could catch a poem thrown silently across a cafe, who understood that the most beautiful thing ever said to them might arrive not as a sound but as a shape their grandmother made with her hand, once, slowly, watching their face. I have been learning their language, slowly, badly, the way I draw — to feeling, not to scale. I wanted to be able to take Taro's breathing and also, somehow, to greet it properly, in the register it deserves. The two poets are among the living, one of them at least, very old now, who comes to the hall and stands before Taro and signs to it, long flowing poems I cannot fully read, and the great double body breathes in its visible rhythm, twelve to the minute, and I would swear — I will swear it, into the register, on my reputation as an honest and unreliable witness — that the rhythm of the breathing matches the rhythm of the hands, that the citizen is signing back, that Taro has learned the only language its life ever spoke and is answering, in the fullest speech there is, which turns out not to be sound at all, but a shape made faithfully, in the air, while someone you love watches your face. The old poet has been teaching me a single sign, patiently, over many mornings, the sign the two of them built between themselves for I love you that meant also you specifically and also still and also more than yesterday and also watch my face while I tell you. It is not, the poet has made me understand, a sign I am entitled to use — it was

theirs, private, evolved across a lifetime of one face watching another — but they are teaching it to me anyway, as one teaches a foreigner a word from a home they will never live in, so that I will understand in my own clumsy hands the thing the hearing world keeps failing to grasp: that this was not a poorer way of saying I love you but an immeasurably richer one, a sentence the hands could complete in the time the mouth takes to clear its throat, a whole essay of devotion delivered in one motion to one watching face. When I make the sign badly the poet laughs, not unkindly, and makes it again, true, and I watch their old face do the thing their beloved's face once did, ten thousand mornings, across a cafe table thick with unoverheard poetry, and I think: the hearing world believed it was the lucky one. The hearing world was the one that could not read the most beautiful thing being said in the city. The pity was always pointing the wrong way. I asked the poet, with my hands and with written notes and with the long patience the deaf extend to the hearing who are at last bothering to learn, what had become of all the poems — the ones made in the air, face to face, present tense, that could not be written down without ceasing to be themselves. Were they lost? And the poet considered this for a long while, and then signed, slowly, so that even I could read it: a poem made in the air is not lost when the air clears, any more than a dance is lost when the dancer sits down, any more than a morning is lost when the sun moves on. It happened. It was complete. It was caught by the one it was thrown to. That is not less than a poem in a book; it is more, because a poem in a book is waiting to be alive and a poem in the air already was. And then the poet signed the private sign, once, to Taro, to the great double body breathing in its visible rhythm, and Taro breathed, twelve to the minute, and I will swear into the register on my honour as an honest and unreliable witness that the rhythm of the breath matched the rhythm of the hands, that the citizen answered, that the poem was caught, that nothing made in the air on this island in love was ever, for one moment, lost. Registrar's note: I am learning to sign. My signs are clumsy as my draughtsmanship. The old poet corrects me with great patience and great delight and tells me, with their hands, that clumsy love is still love, that the city took fifty years to learn to read and I may take a few. I am keeping that sentence. It is the best review my register will ever receive.

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Plate XI. AURORA, called the Faithful Dawn

Plate the Eleventh. AURORA — the largest of the citizens, nearest the glass, lit so fully by the river-morning that it seems made of dawn itself; photographed, as she would have insisted, at the only hour she would permit. STATURE the largest of the eleven; nearest the glass, lit so fully it seems to be made of morning COMPLEXION every shade the river takes at dawn, rose into gold into a white like the first light on water PRONOUNS she · her · the one who married the morning and kept every vow RESPIRATION fifteen breaths the minute, full and bright; the breath of a painter at her easel at first light FIRST INFLATION at dawn, of course; always, only, faithfully, at dawn HOLDS the life of Aurora, painter, who painted the river every morning for fifty years and called it love Aurora is the largest, and stands nearest the glass, and is lit so fully by the river-morning that on the best days it seems not to be coloured but to be made of dawn itself — rose going up into gold going up into a white like the first light striking water — and it breathes the fullest brightest breath in the hall, fifteen to the minute, the breath of someone who has been up since before the sun and is glad, is specifically

and reliably glad, to be exactly where she is. The life Aurora holds is the longest love story in the register, and the beloved is the river, and the love was kept, faithfully, every single dawn, for fifty years. Aurora was a painter, and early in her life she made herself one promise, the way some people promise themselves a great accomplishment and others promise themselves a daily devotion, and Aurora, wisely, chose the devotion: she would paint the river at dawn every morning of her life. Not the same painting. The same river, the same hour, the same window, and a different painting every single day, because the river at dawn is never twice the same, because the light is a new light each morning and the water a new water, and Aurora understood early what most of us learn late or never, that faithfulness is not the repetition of the identical but the daily fresh attention to the same beloved thing, which is never identical, which rewards the faithful eye with infinite variety precisely because the eye keeps showing up. And she loved, in the long human way, several times, variously, gladly. She loved men and she loved women and she loved a few people the words of her era had no comfortable box for, and she did not apologise for the range of it any more than she would have apologised for the range of colours on her palette, because to Aurora the loving was of a piece with the painting: it was attention, paid faithfully, to whatever beloved thing was before her, and the beloved things were various because the world is various, and a heart that can love only one kind of beloved is, she said, like a palette with only one colour, technically a palette, practically a tragedy. She had husbands and she had a wife and she had loves that lived across whole decades and loves that lived a single luminous summer, and she painted through all of them, every dawn, the one constant beloved that never left and never had to be explained to anyone, the river, going gold under her faithful eye. I asked her once — for she lived to be very old and very bright, and I knew her at the end of her life and the beginning of my register — whether she had ever felt she had to choose, between the various loves and the steady one, between the people and the river. And she laughed, the full bright laugh that Aurora the citizen breathes in its rising, and she said: choose? Registrar, you have misunderstood the entire situation. The river taught me how to love the people. Fifty years of showing up at dawn for something that is never twice the same and never owes me anything and never stays — fifty years of loving the river taught me exactly how to love a person: faithfully, freshly, without demanding they be yesterday's version, grateful for the variety, present at the daily dawn of them. The people did not compete with the river. The river was my teacher and the people were my graduation. I loved them all the better for having practised, every morning, on the water. She painted her last dawn very near the end, from a chair someone carried to the window, with a brush someone had to help her hold, and it was, by every account, not her best painting, the hand being what it was, and she did not care in the slightest, because the promise had never been to paint well. The promise had been to paint, at dawn, faithfully, and she kept it to the last possible dawn, and the keeping was the masterpiece, the fifty-year unbroken devotion was the masterpiece, of which each individual painting was merely a single brushstroke. When I take Aurora's breathing in the mornings I take it at dawn, deliberately, because it would be an insult to take it at any other hour, and the great body rises full and bright fifteen to the minute, lit by the very river it loved, and I understand that I am in the presence of the longest faithful happiness in the hall, a love that asked nothing and showed up everything, and outlasted every grief by the simple method of being renewed, free of charge, every morning, by a sun that does not know or care that it is being adored and is adored anyway, which is the purest form of love there is, and the most teachable, and the one this whole bright archive has, I now see, been quietly practising. I have seen some of the dawn paintings — they are scattered now across the island, in the apartments of the

people she loved and the people they loved, a diaspora of mornings — and the remarkable thing, the thing that stops you, is that they are not really paintings of the river at all. They are paintings of attention. The river is merely what the attention happened to be pointed at; what is actually on the canvas, morning after morning for fifty years, is the record of a particular human consciousness showing up, awake, before the sun, glad, to look hard at something it loved and had no intention of possessing. Stand in front of a row of them and you are not looking at fifty sunrises; you are looking at fifty proofs that a person got up, that a person chose the looking again, that the again accumulated into a body of work the way breath accumulates into a body, until the largest citizen in the hall could be filled with it. Aurora is the largest not because the painter was grand but because fifty years of faithful agains is simply a great deal of breath, and it has to go somewhere, and it went into a body lit, fittingly, by the very river it had spent a life adoring. Near the end she gave the river away, which is the most Aurora thing she ever did. She had no children of the body and a great many of the spirit, and to each of them, in the last year, she gave a single instruction rather than a painting: pick a thing, she said, one thing, and show up for it at the same hour every day for the rest of your life, and do not demand it be the same, and do not demand it stay, and do not demand it love you back, and watch what fifty years does to your heart. She was teaching them the river without the river, handing down the devotion the way Custard handed down the glitter and Tova the starter and Meridian the floor, by rule, by lineage, by the insistence that the bright thing be transmissible. And so there are people on this island now who show up faithfully at dawn for a particular tree, a particular stretch of harbour, a particular window, a particular sleeping face, and who are, without quite knowing it, continuing Aurora's fifty-year love affair in a hundred new directions, and Aurora breathes fifteen to the minute, full and bright, lit by the river at the hour she would permit no other, and I take its breathing at dawn and only at dawn, because she taught me, from a chair, with a brush she could barely hold, that some faithfulness is not transferable to convenient hours, and that this non-transferability is not a burden but the entire point, the thing that makes it love and not merely habit. Registrar's note: I take Aurora's breathing only at dawn. On the mornings I oversleep I do not take it late; I wait until the next dawn. Some faithfulness is not transferable to convenient hours. She taught me that, from a chair, by a window, with a brush she could barely hold and would not put down.

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the changing of the light, the last time I came to the window, as the island had asked. The two largest citizens breathed behind me — Taro signing in its sleep, Aurora full of the dawn — and beyond the glass the river took the light and gave it back, and the patient towers stood across the water keeping their old secrets, and the island spoke to me from everywhere at once, and very close, in the second person, at the changing of the light, for the last time. You have catalogued eleven, said the island. Smallest to largest. Door to river. And you wondered at the order, because the order by size kept turning, under your hand, into another order you could not name. The order of courage, I said. You told me that at the start. Each one placed by the morning they were brave. Yes. But you did not have the unit, said the island. You cannot place lives in the order of their courage unless you can measure courage, and courage is not measured in years, or in size, or in volume of breath. So tell me, Registrar, now that you have walked the whole hall and laid your hand on every one of them — what is the unit? In what do you measure the bravery that set this order? And I stood at the glass with the river going gold and I found that I knew, that I had known since Lull, that the whole walk had been

teaching me the unit one citizen at a time. Mornings, I said. The unit is mornings. Not how big the life, or how long, or how loud. How many ordinary mornings the person got up and did the small brave chore again. Inés turning on the radio, again. Tova lighting the oven, again. Sunny opening the door, again. Aurora painting the dawn, again, fifty years of agains. The courage is the again. The unit is mornings, faithfully repeated, and you arranged them by how many faithful agains it took, and that is why the order looks like size from the outside — because a life accumulates, a body fills, with every morning it dares to rise again. Yes, said the island, and I have never heard it sound so glad. Mornings. The again. Now turn around, Registrar. You have catalogued eleven citizens. Count them once more, but this time, count the room. And I turned around, and I counted, and I will set the count down here exactly as it came to me, because it reorganized the entire register and I have refused, against all tidiness, to move it to the front. I counted eleven soft bodies. And then I counted the hall that held them — the long pale floor, the wall of grid, the wall of glass, the leaning soffit, the whole great breathing room — and I understood that it, too, was rising and falling, very slowly, hugely, at the slowest rate of all, one breath to my many; that the building was not a container for the citizens but the twelfth and largest of them; that the hall itself was inflated with a life, the longest life of all, the accumulated breath of every faithful morning this shore had ever dared, every radio and oven and lock and lamp and tin and signed poem and painted dawn, all of it, gathered into one enormous soft body big enough to hold a city, breathing once for every twelve times I breathed, and that the life the hall held, the breath that filled the twelfth citizen, was the island itself. I am the twelfth, said the island, softly, all around me, rising. I do not give myself a number, because you cannot number the room you are standing in; you can only notice, one bright morning, that it has been breathing with you the whole time. I am made of their agains. Every morning one of my people dared to rise again as themselves, I filled a little more, and now look at me — look how full I have become, how I press against my own ceiling, how I cannot be asked to be smaller. I was told to be smaller too, once. A city can be told that. I have stopped consenting. I am the largest soft monument on the western shore and I am made entirely of the courage of the people the rest of the world spent a century learning to spell, and I will not deflate, and I keep them all, and you keep me, and that is what an archive is: the part of the city that finally turned around, and counted the room, and found it breathing. And then, because the island has a sense of humour that fifty thousand mornings will give a place, it said one last thing, and I have made it the last entry of the catalogue proper, because it is the truest and the most absurd and the most joyful, and it is addressed, the island was very clear, not to me but to you, the one reading, the one who has walked the whole hall with me, door to river, smallest to largest, eleven citizens and the room that holds them. There is space along the river wall, said the island, for one more. There is always space along the river wall for one more. The procession does not end; it is only as long, this morning, as the courage gathered so far. You have a body and a breath and a great many ordinary mornings still ahead of you, and every one of them that you dare to rise again as exactly and entirely yourself is another lungful poured into the largest citizen, another inch I rise, another reason I cannot be made smaller. I am not finished. An archive is never finished. Come back tomorrow, at the changing of the light, and bring your again, and add it to the room. I will be here. I will be breathing. Still here, Registrar. Still here. Still, after everything, gladly, becoming.

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Afterword

On Keeping a Register of Things That Will Not Hold Still

A register is supposed to be a list of things that stay put. That is its whole dignity: the ledger does not move, and so the world can be checked against it. I took this work believing I had signed on to that dignity. I would walk the hall, I would write down what was there, and the writing would fix the citizens in place the way a pin fixes a bright moth, and visitors a hundred years hence would consult my register and find the hall exactly as I had left it. I have failed at this completely, and I want to spend the last pages explaining why the failure is the truest thing in the book. The citizens will not hold still. They breathe — that I expected, and learned to measure. But they also grow. Vesper rises a hair toward the soffit each year. The crest of confetti above Marisol catches a little more light. The shimmer from Custard keeps getting onto new hands, and the beat beneath Meridian recruits new spines, and Quince, who is eleven, will not stay eleven, and the largest citizen of all, the room itself, fills a little more with every faithful morning the shore dares. A register of breathing things is a register written on water at dawn. The moment you set it down it is already, gloriously, out of date. I used to think this made my work futile, and I was briefly, fashionably melancholy about it, in the manner of registrars who have read too many sad books about the impossibility of holding on to anything. Then Aurora cured me, from her chair, by her window. I had said something wistful about how nothing in the hall would stay the way I catalogued it, how my register was obsolete before the ink dried. And she looked at me with the bright impatience of someone who had painted the same river fifty years and never once painted it twice, and she said: child, you have the job exactly backwards. You think a register is for stopping things. A register is for keeping up with them. You are not the pin. You are the eye. Show up at dawn, attend to the beloved thing as it is this morning, write that down, and come back tomorrow and do it again. The faithfulness is not in the writing staying true. The faithfulness is in your coming back. So I have rewritten my understanding of the work, and I set the new understanding here, for whoever keeps the register after me, because someone will, an archive is never finished and neither is its keeping. To register the citizens of the Pneumatorium is not to embalm them. It is to love them in the manner Aurora loved the river: faithfully, freshly, present at their daily dawn, grateful for the variety, never demanding they be yesterday's version. The register is not a tomb. It is a standing appointment. It is the part of the city that promises to keep turning around.

I am often asked — by visitors, by the smaller-hearted seasons that still blow through, by my own three-in-the-morning self — whether all this joy is not a kind of avoidance. Whether a happy archive of these particular lives is not, in some way, a refusal to look at how hard the lives were. I have thought about this honestly, because the question deserves honesty and not a slogan. And my answer, the answer of the whole register, is this: I know the lives were hard. The citizens know it better than I ever will; it is in their breath, in the long patience of Marisol, in the broken-then-mended door that Sol holds, in the silence the world tried to pity Taro for. I have not hidden the hardness. I have refused to let it be the headline. There is a difference between a register that pretends there was no night and a register that decides, deliberately, with a broom in its hand like Sunny, that the last word will be the dancing. I have decided the last word will be the dancing. This is not avoidance. This is the most considered choice in the book. The hardness has had a century of headlines. The joy has waited

a long time for its turn at the top of the page, and I am the Registrar, and I have given it the turn, and I would do it again. Again. The unit is mornings. The courage is the again. I want to say a word about why these particular citizens, and not others. People sometimes come to the hall expecting a hall of martyrs and find instead a hall of mornings — a baker, a bartender, two grandmothers, a child, a house of dancers, a man and a carton of milk — and they are briefly disappointed, because they had come to grieve and the hall declines to let them only grieve. But I chose the mornings on purpose. The world already has its monuments to the nights. There are names on walls, and there should be, and I have stood at those walls and wept and I commend the weeping. But there was, when I began, no monument to the mornings after — to the simple unbludgeoned daily joy of these lives, the breakfasts and the dancing and the painted dawns, the ordinary radiant business of people being fully themselves on an island that learned, slowly, by their example, to let them. That monument did not exist. So I built it, out of breath, eleven citizens and the room that holds them, and I made it pink and yellow and absurd and enormous, because grief knows how to be solemn and joy, this kind of joy, the hard-won daily kind, knows best how to be light. I must also confess a limit, because a register that hid its limits would be a brochure. The eleven are not the eleven bravest, or the eleven most important, or the eleven most representative of anything. They are eleven that the hall happened to inflate, eleven whose breath happened to be stored, out of a number so much larger that I cannot write it down without the figure dissolving into the absurd, which is the correct response of arithmetic to the question of how many people on this island have spent a morning being bravely themselves. For every Inés there were a thousand who danced on a thousand other piers and were never inflated and were no less brave. For every Tova, a thousand bakers; for every Sunny, a thousand kept doors. The hall holds eleven and gestures at the multitude, the way a single lit window gestures at the dark city full of other lit windows, each with its own Halcyon blinking still here across its own dark water. I did not choose the eleven to crown them above the rest. I catalogued the eleven because a register must be specific or it is only a sentiment, and eleven specific lives, fully kept, say more about the multitude than the multitude said in the abstract ever could. Love is specific. The hall is specific. The eleven are eleven doors left open onto a city of open doors. And so to the visitor who walks the hall and does not find their own people in it — who looks for their particular grandmother, their particular bar, their particular morning, and does not find it catalogued — I say: that is not an absence, it is an invitation. The hall did not forget your people. The hall is waiting for you to be their Registrar. The breath is still out there, unstored, in the lives you carry; the bodies along the river wall are still uninflated; and the work of keeping a register, I have learned across this whole bright tenure, is not a thing one person does for a city but a thing a city does for itself, one faithful keeper at a time, each catching what they can before it clears like a poem from the air. I caught eleven. Catch yours. There is room. There is always, the island was at great pains to tell me, room. The last thing, and then I will let you go, because a register should know when to stop registering and let the living get back to the business of giving it new material. The island told you, at the end of the catalogue, that there is space along the river wall for one more, and that the one more is you. I want to confirm, in my own voice, off the record of the conversation with the island, in the plain voice of a person who keeps a list, that this is not a metaphor I am obliged to offer you as a tidy ending. It is the operative finding of my entire tenure. I have measured the largest citizen, the room, and it is still filling. Something is still pouring in. And when I traced the inflow — this took me a long time, and a good deal of sitting on the cool floor at the changing of the light — I found that it comes from outside the hall. From the

street. From the island. From every person out there who got up this morning and dared, in some small unphotographed way, to rise again as exactly and entirely themselves. That is the breath that fills the twelfth citizen. That is the again the room is made of. You are, whether you visit the hall or not, already pouring in. You have been a soft monument all along. I am only the one who finally got around to writing it down. Come back tomorrow, at the changing of the light. Bring your again. The floor is cool, the river is about to go gold, and the room — the largest, gentlest, most stubborn citizen of all — is breathing, and will be glad, in its slow huge way, one breath to your many, to feel you add your morning to the held breath of the shore.

— Surjan, Registrar of the Pneumatorium written at dawn, as everything worth keeping is

Catalogue of Architectural Plates & Map

with the Registrar's annotations, such as they are worth

What follows is the full account of the four plates drawn for this register, of which the first, the Map of the Island, appears at the head of the catalogue, and the remaining three are reproduced here. I drew them all myself, with a wooden ruler that had been left on a sunny windowsill and had warped into a gentle curve, so that every straight line in these drawings is in fact very slightly the arc of a smile. I considered replacing the ruler. I decided the smile was load-bearing. A note on scale: the reader will find, on the Map, that distance is given in "one mile of held breath," and on the elevation, "one held breath to the metre." These units do not convert to the ordinary kind. They were not meant to. A hall full of breathing lives is not measured in the same units as a parking structure, and I will not insult the citizens by pretending otherwise.

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Plate I. The Island of Manhattan Reproduced at the head of the catalogue. The island is shown in its true tilt, the grid faintly drawn, the Great Park set like a green tile a little above centre, and the Pneumatorium marked by a star upon the western shore, a little south of the Park, where the land leans closest to the water. The compass rose is correct. The scale bar is honest about being dishonest. I have drawn the Hudson and the East River as the two arms that hold the island, and the harbour below as the open mouth through which the whole island breathes; this is not geography, it is respiration, and the reader who wishes for geography is gently directed to any other map ever made.

❦

Plate II. Longitudinal Elevation of the Hall

The eleven citizens seen in elevation, ascending from the door (left) toward the river (right), smallest to largest — which the reader now knows is also door-of-the-past toward morning-of-the-most-recent-courage. The leaning soffit is drawn true; it really does lean, and Vesper really does rise to meet it. An elevation is a drawing made as though one wall of a building had been politely removed and you were permitted to look straight in without the inconvenience of perspective. I have removed the river wall. You are standing in the Hudson, looking back at the shore, which is the river's own point of view and the one the citizens spend their days enjoying. From here the ascending order is plain: the bodies grow as they near the water, and the dimension line at the right gives the clear height of breath as fourteen metres, which is the gap between the cool floor and the leaning soffit at the river end, and which shrinks, as I have confessed, by a hair each year, as the largest citizen quietly fills.

❦

Plate III. Cabinet Oblique of a Gallery

A single gallery bay in cabinet oblique: the front face drawn true, the depth running back at forty-five degrees and at half its true measure, so that the citizens recede toward the luminous wall without the lies that perspective tells. The nearest citizen is shown whole; the others diminish along the oblique into the glass. The cabinet oblique is my favourite of the conventions, and I will tell you why, because it is the convention that most resembles the truth about these lives. In ordinary perspective, the things far from you shrink dishonestly, dwindling toward a vanishing point, as though distance diminished a thing's reality. The oblique refuses this. It draws the front face true and lets the depth recede at a fixed honest angle, at a knowable half-scale, so that the far citizen is drawn smaller than the near one by exactly a stated amount and not one bit more — diminished by distance, yes, but never made unreal by it, never allowed to vanish. This is precisely how the register treats the citizens furthest from us in time. Inés is far back along the oblique; she does not therefore vanish. She is drawn true, at her honest half-scale of distance, fully real, the front face of her courage facing us across the depth of the years. The oblique is the projection of a draughtsman who has decided that the past will not be permitted to dwindle into a vanishing point. I drew it that way on purpose. The warped ruler helped.

❦

Plate IV. Plan of the Pneumatorium

The hall seen from above: the city-side wall in poché at the top, the curtain wall of glass along the river at the bottom, the citizens as circles of increasing size processing from the threshold (left) toward the river end (right). Inset, lower right: the breath-rose, recording the citizens' inhale and exhale upon a single dial. A plan is the drawing of a building as a bird would understand it, or as the breath would, rising to the soffit and looking down. From above, the procession is at its clearest: the citizens advance in a single file between the grid and the water, growing as they go, and the dashed centre-line that runs the length of them is the line I walk each morning, threshold to river, taking the breathing one body at a time. The breath-rose in the corner is an instrument of my own devising, on which I plot the inhale and exhale of the whole hall upon one dial; the gold quadrant is the inhale, the rose quadrant the exhale, and the reader will note that the dial has no hand, because the breathing keeps its own time and would not consent to be pointed at. These four plates, with the catalogue they accompany, constitute the complete architectural record of the Pneumatorium as it stood, and breathed, and grew, during the tenure of the present Registrar. They will be out of date by the next dawn. That is correct. That is the building working as designed.

Appendix

I On the Unit of the Morning a short essay on the measurement of courage, by the Registrar

Every register requires a unit. The merchant counts in coins, the surveyor in chains, the astronomer in the distance light idles across in a year. I am charged with registering courage, and courage had no unit when I began, and I want to set down here, for whoever keeps the hall after me,

the unit I was obliged to discover, and why no other will serve. I tried, at first, to measure courage in danger — to rank the citizens by how much each had risked, on the reasonable assumption that the bravest is the one who faced the most. This failed immediately and instructively. By the measure of danger, Sol, who fixed a broken lock the morning after violence, would outrank Quince, who was loved safely at a dinner table; and yet to sit in the hall and feel the two citizens breathe is to know past argument that the child's Tuesday is not a lesser courage than the bartender's morning. They are the same size in the only dimension that matters. The measure of danger flatters the dramatic and slanders the ordinary, and the ordinary, I have learned, is where most courage actually lives, disguised, as the island told me, as errands. I tried next to measure courage in firstness — to honour most the ones who went earliest, who had the least company in the bravery. This is the principle that places Lull near the door, and it is not wrong, and I have kept it as the visible order. But it too fails as the true unit, because it cannot tell you why Aurora, who came late, who was brave in a season when much had already been won, fills the largest body in the hall. Firstness is real and firstness is honoured and firstness is not the unit, because courage did not end when the first dancer was joined. It went on being required, every morning, by everyone, in smaller and quieter and no less necessary amounts, long after the firstness was spent. The unit, when it came to me — at the window, at the changing of the light, with the river going gold and the island speaking — was the morning. Not the morning as a span of hours, but the morning as a decision: the discrete, repeatable, daily act of rising again as oneself, in a world that would, on many of those mornings, have preferred a smaller version or no version at all. Courage, I now hold, is not a quantity you possess but a quantity you spend, daily, in units of one morning each, and the brave are simply those who have spent the most, and a life's total bravery is therefore the sum of its agains, the integral of its mornings, the accumulated breath of every dawn the person chose to be themselves over again when choosing otherwise was offered and would have been, on the hard days, so much easier.

This unit has three properties that recommend it above all rivals, and I will state them in the manner of the geometers, because the conceit pleases me and because Pomelo, who holds a baker who was also an accountant, would approve of a little rigour at the back of the book. First, the unit of the morning is democratic. A long life and a short one are measured in the same coin, and a child of eleven and an elder of ninety may be, in their accumulated fit, exactly equal, because what is counted is not the number of mornings available but the proportion of them spent in courage, and a child who has been correctly named has spent all the mornings it has been given, which is the most any life can do, and is therefore, by this measure, already complete. Second, the unit of the morning is honest about the ordinary. It refuses to let courage be only the grand occasions, the verdicts and the marches and the cheering squares, which are real and which I honour. It insists that the larger part of all the courage ever spent on this island was spent in small daily denominations — a radio switched on, an oven lit, a lock replaced, a lamp blinked, a name used with the potatoes — and that these denominations, summed across a life and across a city, dwarf the grand occasions the way the sea dwarfs the rivers that feed it. The grand occasions are the rivers. The mornings are the sea. The hall is filled from the sea. Third, and most important, the unit of the morning is inexhaustible, because there is always another morning, and therefore the register is never closed, and therefore the largest citizen is never finished filling, and therefore you — the reader, who has a body and a breath and a great many ordinary mornings still ahead — are not a spectator of this register but a contributor to it, whether you ever set foot in the hall or not. Every morning you spend in courage is poured, by a

hydraulics I have traced and cannot fully explain, into the held breath of the room. This is not consolation. It is measurement. I am a Registrar; I do not offer consolation; I offer the unit, and the unit says: your mornings count, they are counted, they are kept, come back tomorrow and spend another. A note on rival units proposed by others: I am aware that a colleague, whose name the river has worn off my notes, proposed measuring courage in the older unit of the held breath, arguing that a single sustained act of bravery is the true atom. I rejected this. A held breath, however long, must end; a morning recurs. The unit must recur or it cannot measure a life, which is recurrence, which is the again, which is the sea and not the river.

Appendix

II A Glossary of the Hall in which the terms of the register are defined, for visitors and for those who come after

A hall develops a language, the way a household does, the way a love does, and a Registrar who failed to set the language down would be leaving the next keeper to learn it all again from the citizens, who are patient teachers but slow ones, breathing only six to fifteen times the minute. I have therefore assembled the terms of the hall, defined as the hall uses them, which is not always as the wider world uses them, the hall having had reason to revise a number of words the wider world handed it broken. THE AGAIN. The fundamental act of courage; the deciding, on an ordinary morning, to rise once more as exactly and entirely oneself. The unit in which the citizens are arranged. Not a noun the wider world recognises; the hall made it one, because the hall needed a name for the bravest and commonest thing it knew, and found that the wider world had somehow never bothered to name it, having mistaken it for nothing. THE CHANGING OF THE LIGHT. The hour at which the sun crosses the river and the hall passes from lemon to honey to rose; the hour at which the island speaks, in the second person, to whoever is keeping the register. Not a scheduled hour; it changes with the season, as the changing of the light should. The staff know it by the warmth coming up in the bodies before the colour does. THE PNEUMATORIUM. The hall itself; from the breath, the pneuma, and the place-where, the -orium; thus, the place where the breath is kept. Visitors mispronounce it gloriously and the citizens do not mind. The building was something else before it was this; what, exactly, I have not recorded, because what a place was before it began keeping breath is no more relevant than what a person was called before they found their name. A SOFT MONUMENT. A citizen of the hall; a monument that breathes, and yields to the touch, and grows, and cannot be made smaller; the opposite, in every property, of the hard monuments the wider world builds to its certainties. The hard monument commemorates an ending and resists all change; the soft monument commemorates a continuing and insists upon it. The hall holds only the soft kind. It is the only kind that has ever kept a life without killing it first. THE HELD SHORE. The white floor of the hall; so called because it is the held breath of the whole western shore made level enough to walk on. Cool in the mornings. Children sleep on it in the hollow of Lull and are not scolded. POCHÉ. A term I have borrowed from the draughtsmen, who use it for the solid stuff of a wall, the hatched black mass a plan shows as cut through. In the hall it has acquired a second meaning: the dense and necessary substance of an ordinary life, the part that is not the dramatic opening but the wall itself, holding everything up. Most of a life is poché. The register honours the poché. The grand openings

would fall down without it. THE BREATH-ROSE. The instrument, of my own devising, on which the inhale and exhale of the whole hall are plotted upon a single dial; gold for the inhale, rose for the exhale; provided with no hand, the breathing keeping its own time and declining to be pointed at. See Plate IV. A poor instrument by the standards of the sciences and a truthful one by the standards of the hall. THE ORDER OF COURAGE. The true arrangement of the citizens, which the visible arrangement by size conceals and slowly reveals; the sequence of the agains; the timeline that runs door to river and does not end at the river but continues, invisibly, out the glass wall and into every morning not yet spent. The most important term in the glossary and the hardest to see, being made of time and not of stuff. THE TWELFTH CITIZEN. The hall itself; the room that holds the eleven and is the largest of them; unnumbered, because one cannot number the room one is standing in; the island, breathing, filled with the accumulated agains of the western shore. Also, in a sense the island was at pains to make clear, you. See everything. See the whole book. See, when you have closed it, the nearest wall of your own building, against which you are invited to lay a flat hand, and wait. STILL HERE. The message the lamps of Halcyon blinked across the water; the shortest complete sentence in the hall's language; the thing every citizen finally says, in the only grammar each was given — a radio, an oven, a lock, a tin, a pair of hands, a painted dawn. Two words. The whole register, abbreviated. I will let them be the last entry of the glossary, because they are, in the end, the only thing the hall has ever said, in eleven voices and a twelfth, over and over, gladly, at the changing of the light: still here. Still here. Still, after everything, here.

Appendix

III An Index of Mornings being a partial list of the agains catalogued herein, for the use of the faithful

An index is a confession of love disguised as an instrument of retrieval. One indexes what one cannot bear to lose track of. I have indexed the mornings — not the pages, the wider world may find the pages itself, but the mornings, the agains, the small brave repeated chores in which the whole courage of the hall is stored — so that the faithful may find them quickly, on the days they need one, the way one keeps a few good prayers near the front of the book. the bread, lit before dawn, so the block would wake to the smell of being fed — see POMELO the confetti, rose and lemon, thrown at a wedding forty years in the arriving, and never permitted to land — see MARISOL the dawn, painted faithfully, fifty years, never twice the same, never owed anything, adored anyway — see AURORA the door, unlocked on time the morning after the worst night, so the dancing would have somewhere to happen — see SOL the hands, shaping in the air a love too full and fast for sound, caught by the one watching face — see TARO the lamp, blinked across the dark water at the agreed hour, off and on, still here, still here — see HALCYON the name, found on a Tuesday at twenty past four, and used at dinner with the potatoes — see QUINCE the radio, switched on at an empty dawn on the pier, tuned mostly to static, danced to anyway — see LULL the tin of glitter, decades deep, taken from freely and refilled faithfully, the line never breaking — see CUSTARD the voice, come down at last, that said good morning and was answered, without ceremony, sir — see VESPER the floor, renamed noon at midnight, on which the unloved were applauded into existence before they had earned it — see MERIDIAN the room, breathing one slow breath to your many, filling still, with

every morning the shore dares — see THE TWELFTH CITIZEN, and see, when you have closed the book, yourself

This index is partial, as all indexes are, and as the register is, and as the hall is, and as you are, and as a morning is — partial, that is, in the sense of being incomplete, and partial in the sense of being fond. Both meanings are correct. Both meanings are the unit. Come back tomorrow. Bring your again.

Appendix

IV Of the Citizens Still Arriving concerning the bodies not yet inflated, and the space along the river wall

It would be a failure of the register, and a failure of nerve, to end with the eleven and the room and pretend the hall is full. The hall is not full. The hall is never full. There is space along the river wall — I have measured it, it is considerable, it is in fact unbounded, the glass wall being less a limit than a horizon — and into that space new citizens arrive, slowly, as the agains accumulate, as the lives now being lived on the island spend their mornings and store their breath. I cannot catalogue them, because they are not yet inflated, because their lives are not yet stored, because they are out there at this moment having breakfast and going to work and falling in love and being afraid and being brave anyway, which is the condition of a citizen-in-the-making and is indistinguishable, from the outside, from simply being alive on the western shore. But I can tell you what I have glimpsed of them, pressing faintly against the glass, the way a shape presses against a tent before it enters, and I set these glimpses down not as catalogue but as expectation, which is the most hopeful section of any register and the one most often left out. I have glimpsed a citizen who will hold the life of someone not yet born, who will grow up on this island taking for granted every courage that the eleven spent their mornings winning — who will use their own name and their own pronouns and love whom they love as casually as breathing, never knowing, or knowing only as history, that any of it was ever hard. The register has a complicated feeling about this citizen, and I will be honest about the feeling, because honesty is the only currency a register has. There is a grief in being forgotten by the very ease you fought to provide. And there is a joy so much larger than the grief that the grief is embarrassed to remain in the room: the joy of the dancer who went first watching a child dance without once looking over their shoulder, the joy of the whole hall in being, at last, unnecessary to someone, which is the secret ambition of every courage ever spent — not to be remembered, but to make itself unneeded. This citizen, when they arrive, will be among the largest, and will not know why, and that is correct, and that is the entire point, and the eleven would not have it otherwise. I have glimpsed a citizen who will hold the life of someone presently in the hardest part, someone for whom the morning is, right now, today, still difficult — for whom rising again as themselves still costs the full price, in a household or a town or a country that has not yet learned what this island took a century to learn. This citizen is the one I think about most, sitting on the cool floor at the changing of the light, because this citizen is not in the future at all. This citizen is in the present, somewhere, spending mornings at a price the eleven would recognise, and the register exists, finally, for them — to say across whatever distance, in the only grammar a book has, the thing the lamps of Halcyon said across the water: still here. We are still here. The hall is still here, and the door is unlocked, and there is bread, and there is dancing, and there is a tin you may take from freely, and there is space along the

river wall, and your mornings are counted even now, even there, even before you can see the hall, even if you never can. Spend them. They are not wasted. They are pouring, by a hydraulics I have traced and cannot explain, into a room you have not seen, which is rising, which is glad. And I have glimpsed — I will end the catalogue proper here, with this one, because it is the one that made me put down my notebook and sit for a long time in the hollow of Lull — a citizen who will hold no single life at all, but a morning: an ordinary morning, somewhere ahead, on which the last difficult place on the island finally becomes easy, on which the last household learns to use the name with the potatoes, on which courage is required of no one, anywhere on the western shore, because there is nothing left to be brave about, every again having been so thoroughly spent that the spending is complete. The hall calls this the morning of the empty tin — the morning the glitter need not be refilled, because everyone is already shining. It has not come. It may be far. But the register is obliged to record that it is, by the mathematics of the unit, inevitable: that a city spending its agains faithfully enough, for long enough, must eventually run out of difficulty to spend them on, and that on that morning the whole hall will exhale, once, hugely, in relief and in triumph, and the breath of that exhale will be the largest ever stored, and there will be a citizen to hold it, the gentlest and the last, and its name, I have already glimpsed, written in the fold of a body not yet inflated, will be Morning, simply Morning, with no epithet, because it will need none, because by then the word will mean only what it has always secretly meant in this hall, which is: again, and gladly, and unafraid, and together, and still, after everything, here.

❦

Colophon

was compiled, projected, and lovingly mis-measured by the Registrar of the Pneumatorium, who signs only as Surjan, upon the western shore of the island, at the changing of the light.

The map and the three architectural plates were drawn by the same hand, with a wooden ruler warped by the sun into a gentle and permanent smile.

The text is set in Georgia, a letter with serifs enough to keep its footing on a floor that is, at all hours, very gently breathing.

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There is space along the river wall for one more. There is always space along the river wall for one more.

Come back tomorrow. Bring your again. The room will be breathing, and will be glad. — WESTERN SHORE EDITIONS —

Here ends the register, which does not end, being kept each dawn by a new hand; and if you have read this far, the next hand is very possibly your own, and the floor is cool, and the light is about to change, and you are, whether you have noticed it yet or not, already breathing in time.

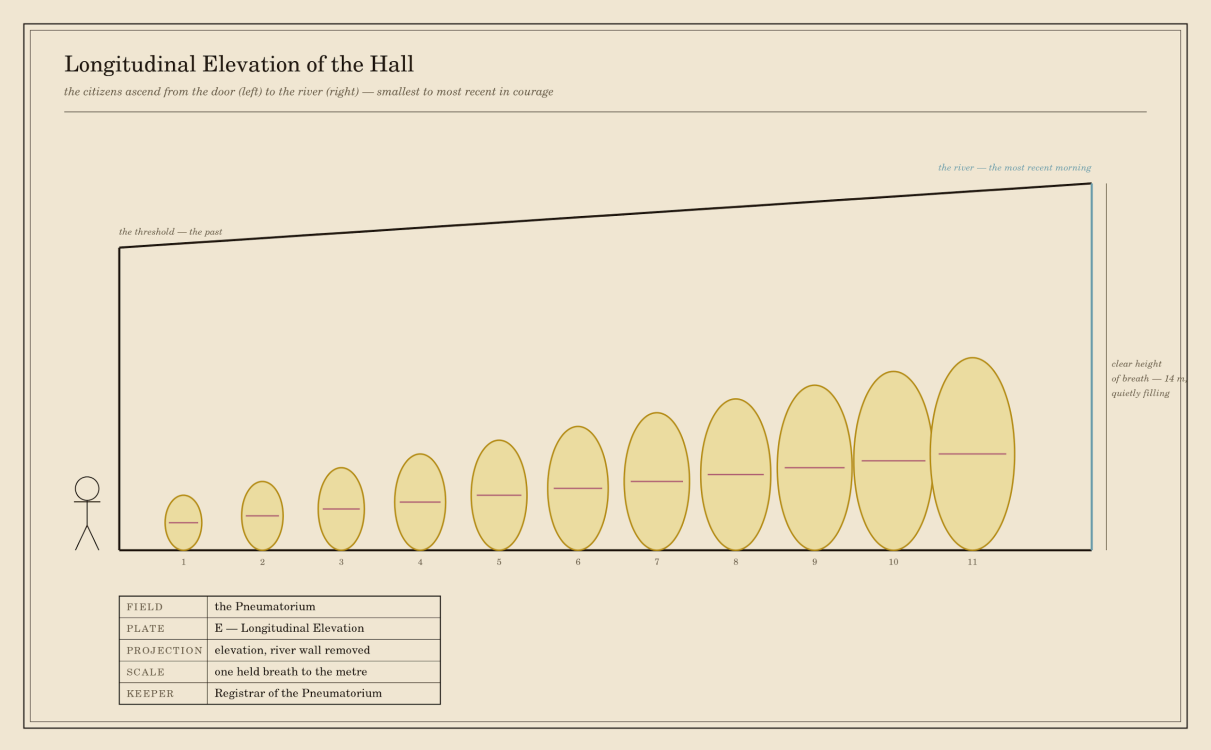


Plate E · Longitudinal Elevation of the Hall — door to river, smallest to most recent in courage.

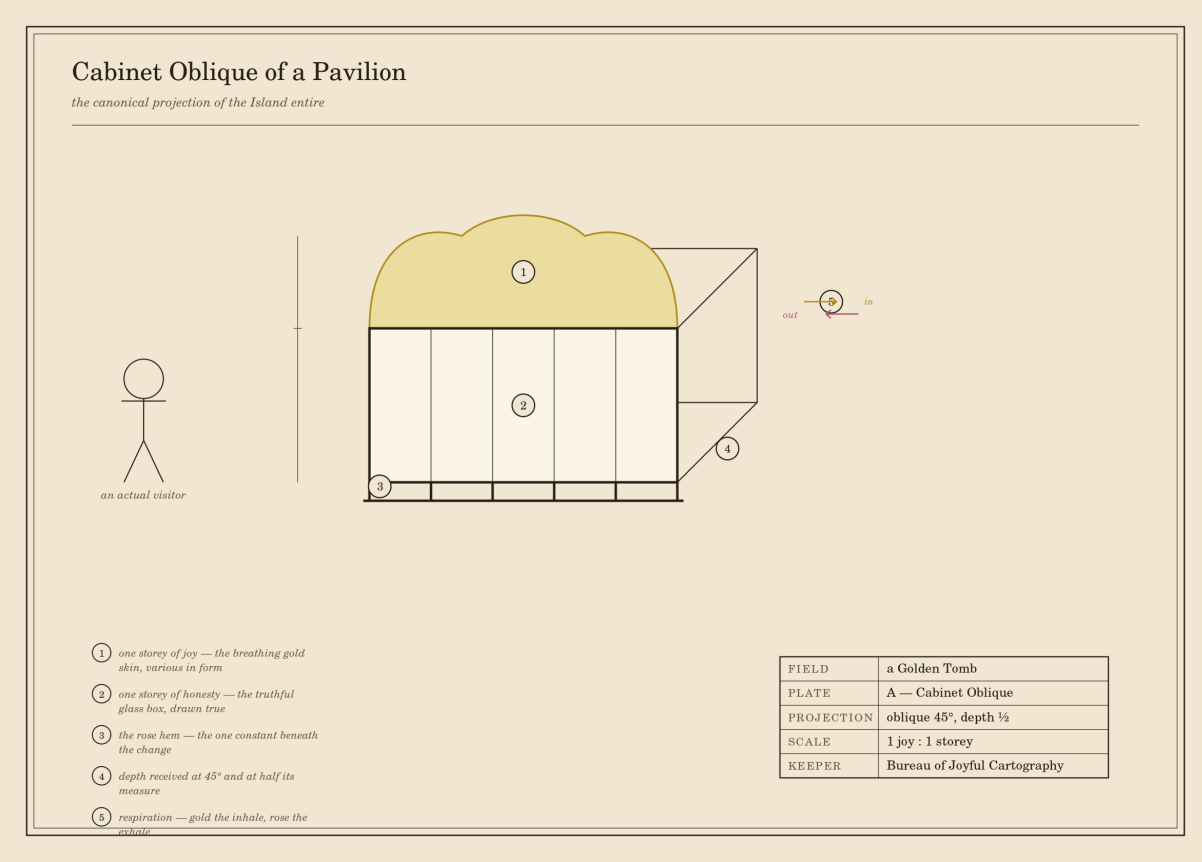

Cabinet Oblique of a Pavilion
the canonical projection of the Island entire
an actual visitor
1
2
3
4
5
out
in
1 one storey of joy — the breathing gold skin, various in form
2 one storey of honesty — the truthful glass box, drawn true
3 the rose hem — the one constant beneath the change
4 depth received at 45° and at half its measure
5 respiration — gold the inhale, rose the exhale
FIELD a Golden Tomb
PLATE A — Cabinet Oblique
PROJECTION oblique 45°, depth ½
SCALE 1 joy : 1 storey
KEEPER Bureau of Joyful Cartography

Plate · Cabinet Oblique — the front face true, the depth half-given.

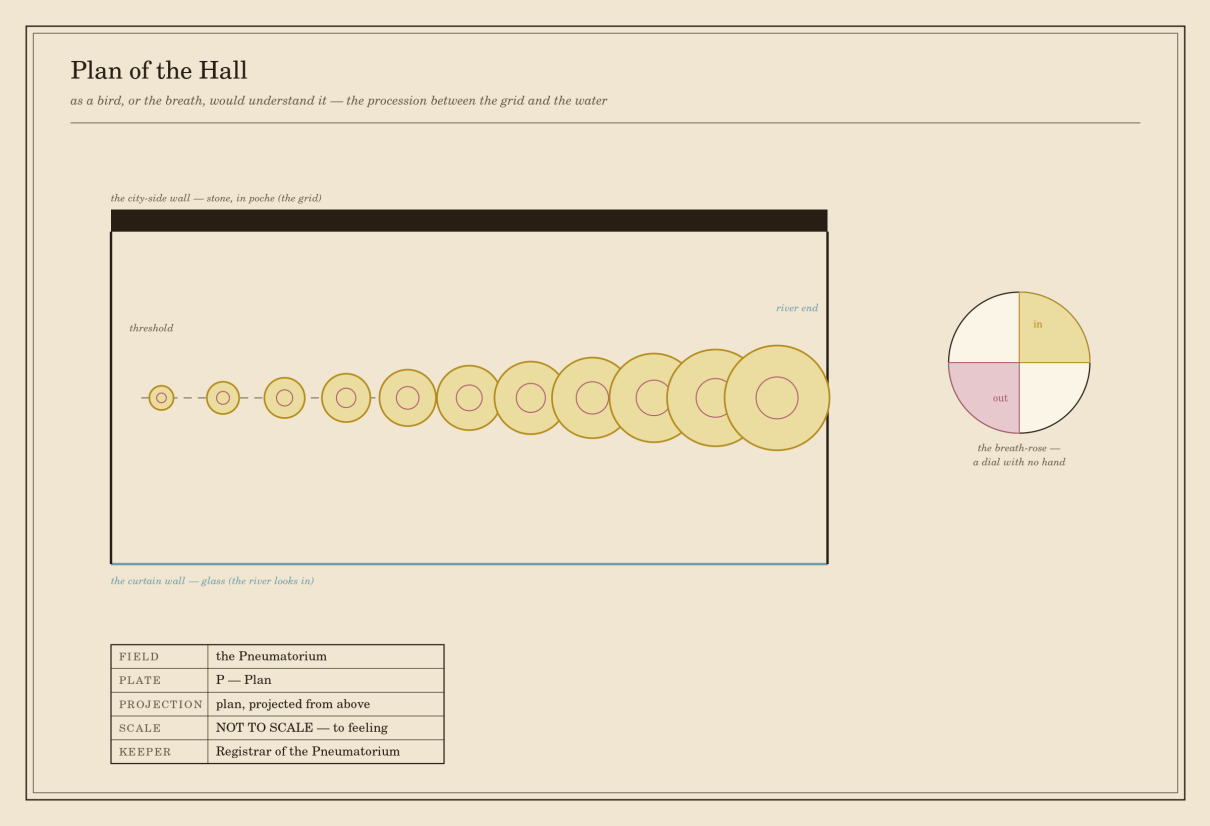


Plate P · Plan of the Hall, with the breath-rose — a dial with no hand.

The Plates of the Source Edition

reproduced from the source edition, in the order of their first appearance

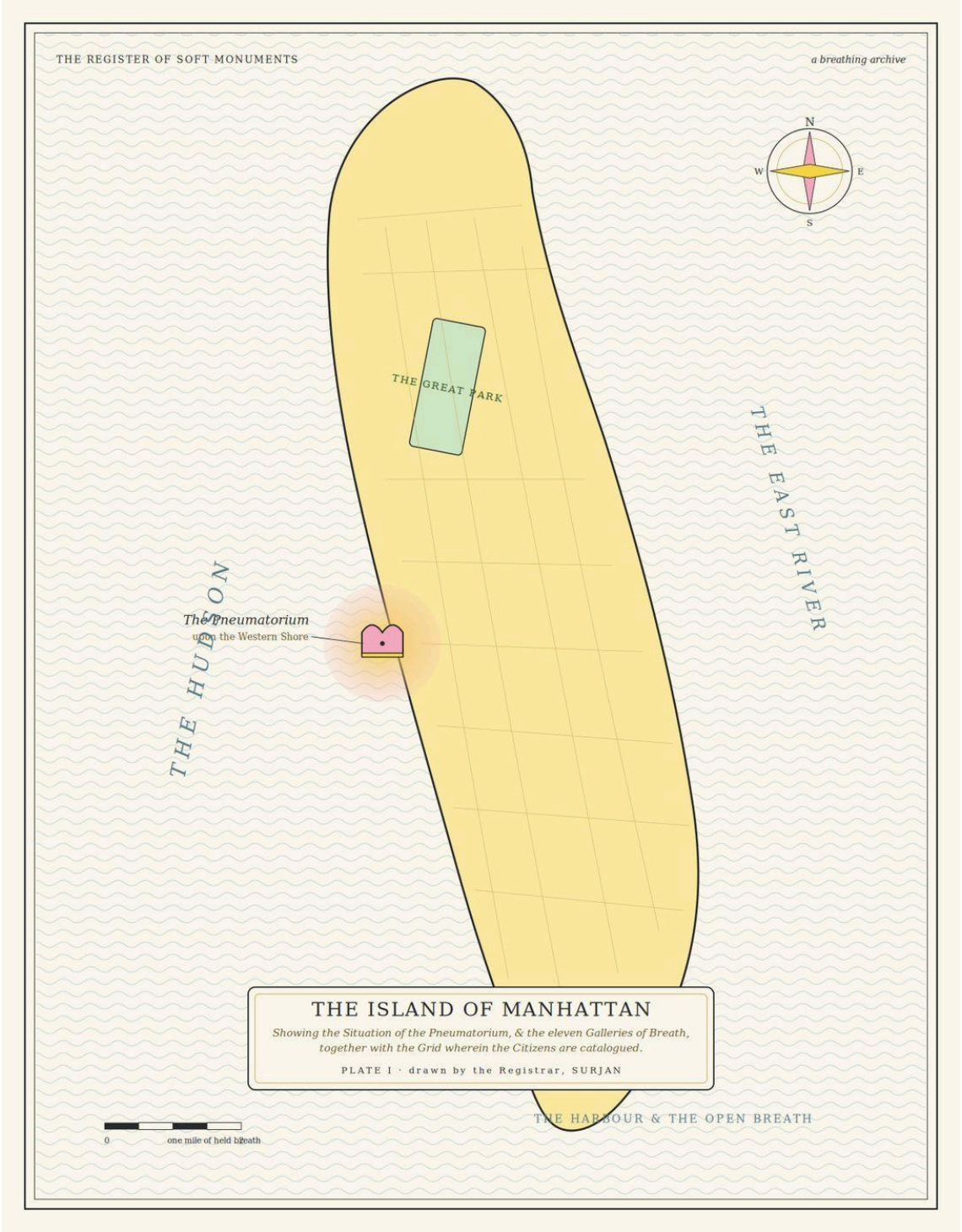

THE REGISTER OF SOFT MONUMENTS
a breathing archive
N
W
E
S
THE GREAT PARK
THE EAST RIVER
THE HUDSON
The Pneumatorium
upon the Western Shore
THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN
Showing the Situation of the Pneumatorium, & the eleven Galleries of Breath, together with the Grid wherein the Citizens are catalogued.
PLATE I · drawn by the Registrar, SURJAN
THE HARBOUR & THE OPEN BREATH
0
one mile of held breath

Plate of the Source Edition — 1

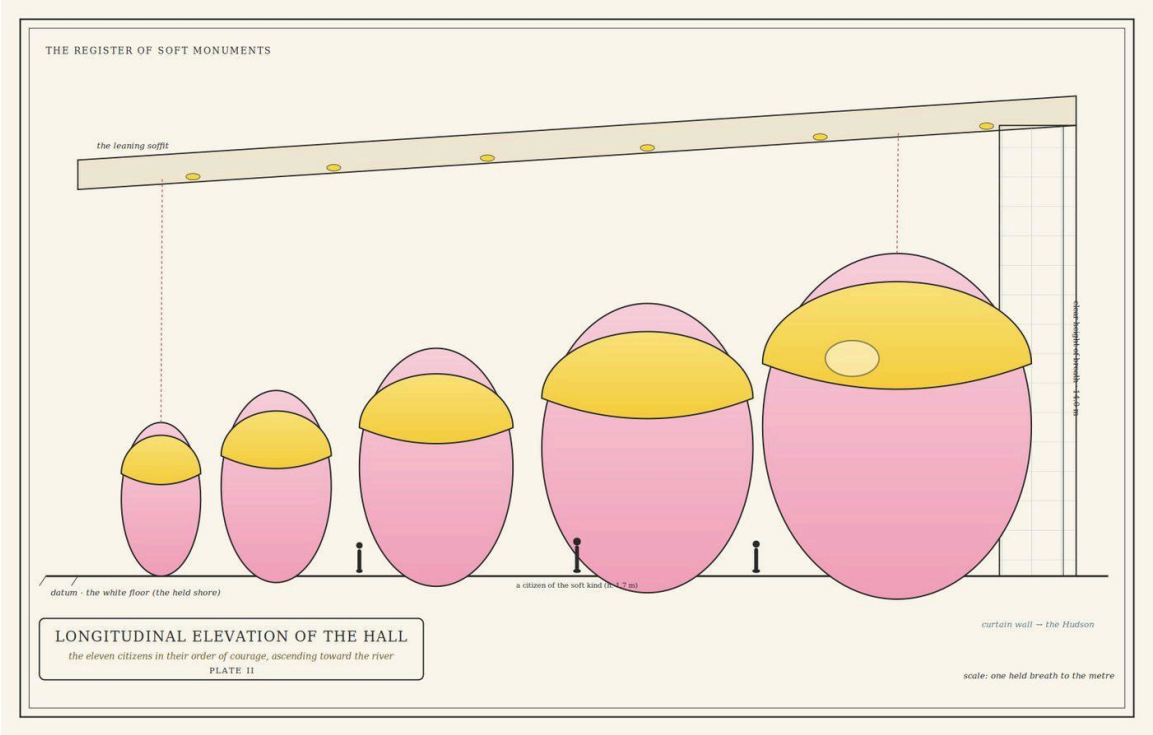

THE REGISTER OF SOFT MONUMENTS
the leaning soffit
datum · the white floor (the held shore)
a citizen of the soft kind (h. 1.7 m)
curtain wall — the Hudson
LONGITUDINAL ELEVATION OF THE HALL
the eleven citizens in their order of courage, ascending toward the river
PLATE II
scale: one held breath to the metre

Plate of the Source Edition — 2

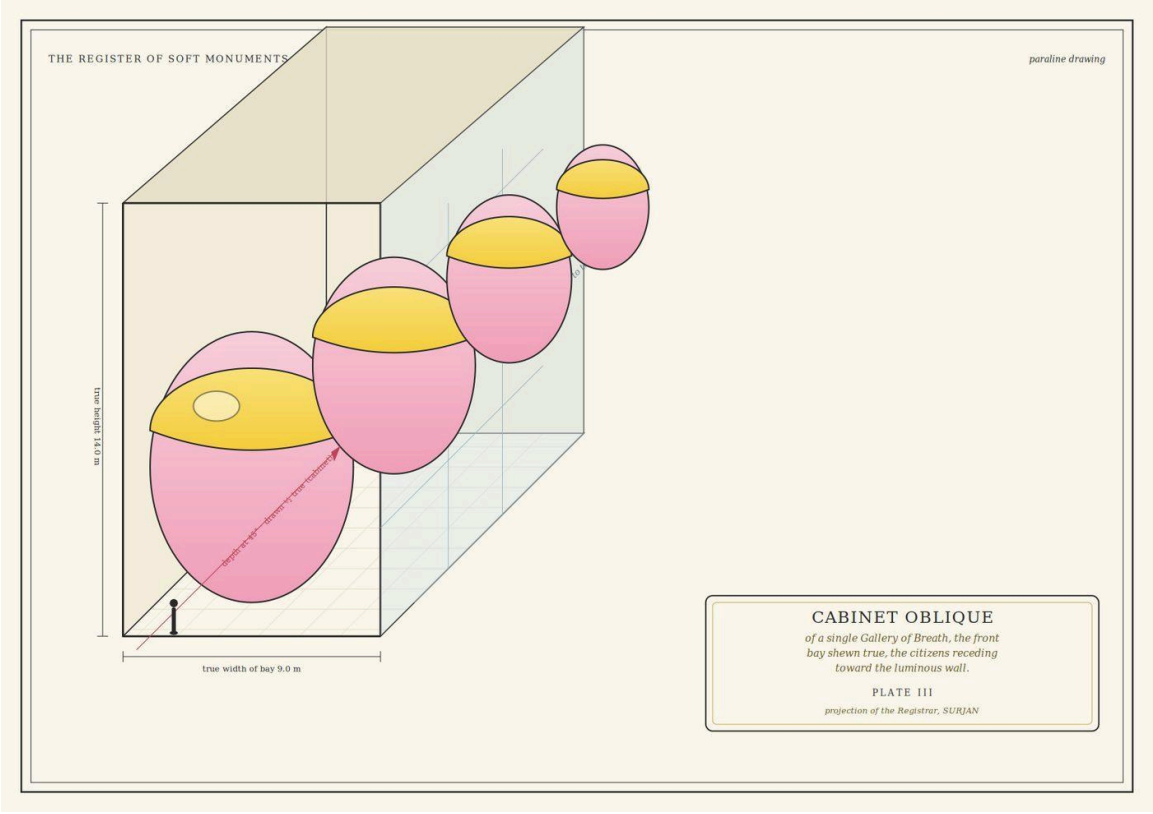

THE REGISTER OF SOFT MONUMENTS
paraline drawing
true height 14.0 m
true width of bay 9.0 m
CABINET OBLIQUE
of a single Gallery of Breath, the front bay shewn true, the citizens receding toward the luminous wall.
PLATE III
projection of the Registrar, SURJAN

Plate of the Source Edition — 3

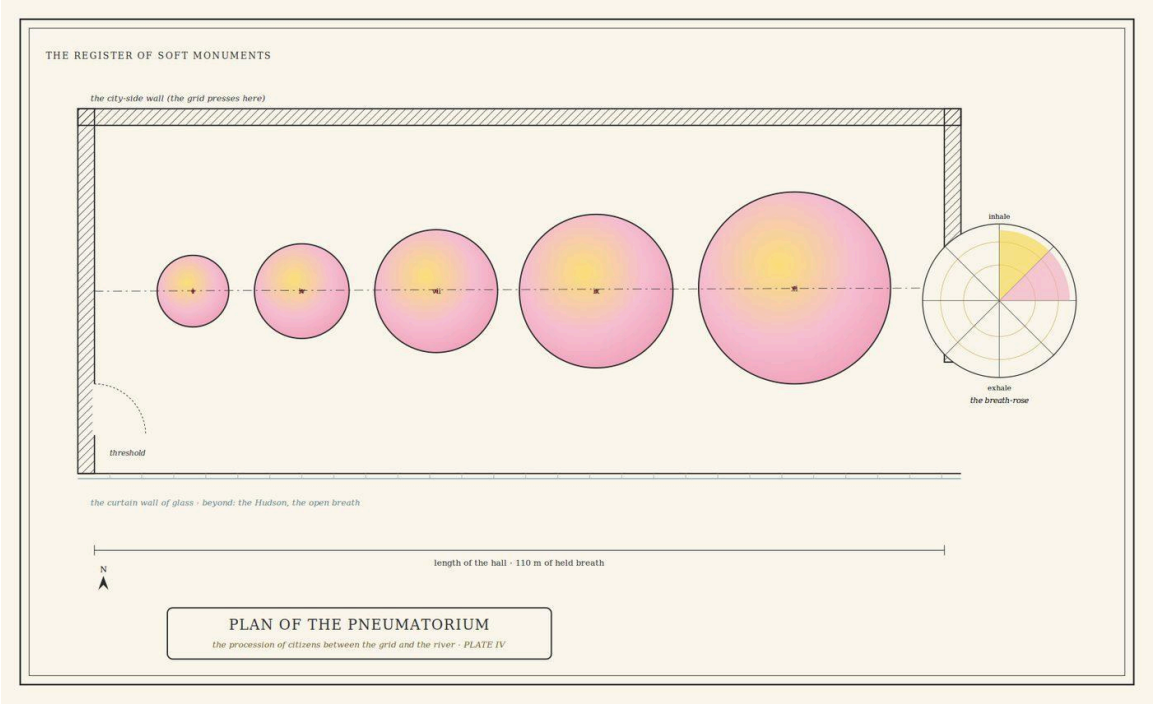

THE REGISTER OF SOFT MONUMENTS
the city-side wall (the grid presses here)
inhale
exhale
the breath-rose
threshold
the curtain wall of glass · beyond: the Hudson, the open breath
length of the hall · 110 m of held breath
N
PLAN OF THE PNEUMATORIUM
the procession of citizens between the grid and the river · PLATE IV

Plate of the Source Edition — 4

Plate of the Source Edition — 5

Book the Fourth · Twenty-Four Ways of Holding Up the Sky

the element of stone — the let-land columns of the Sanctuary School

A Catalogue of the Column-Rooms of the Sanctuary School at the Foot of Mannahatta; in which each yellow column is a guest, a character, and a story of shelter.

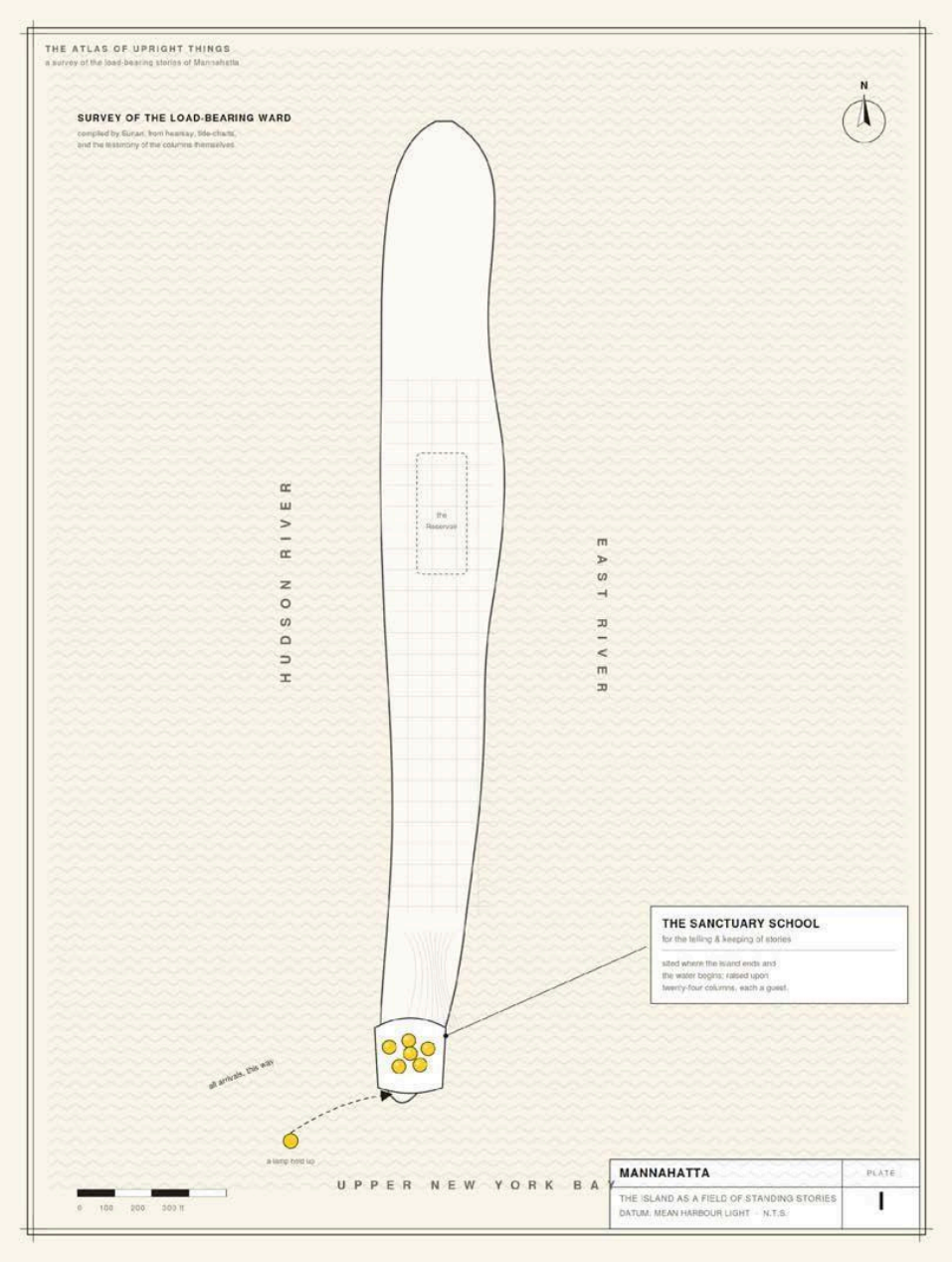
For everyone who was let land — and for the ones still crossing, tonight, toward a far light they are not yet sure is meant for them.

It is. Come. The light is very good.

"The column does not interrupt the room. It is the reason the room agreed to exist." — from the Builders' Catechism, recited at the laying of any first stone

"A city is a list of the people it refused to turn away. The rest is only weather and real estate." — Surjan, in conversation, overheard and written down by a child

"Hold this up," said the sky. And the island, who had been so many things, said: I have done harder." — a saying of the harbour, origin unknown


THE ATLAS OF UPRIGHT THINGS
a survey of the load-bearing stories of Mannahatta
SURVEY OF THE LOAD-BEARING WARD
compiled by Gurari, from heartsay, tide-charts,
and the testimony of the columns themselves
N
HUDSON RIVER
the Reservoir
EAST RIVER
THE SANCTUARY SCHOOL
for the telling & keeping of stories
sited where the island ends and
the water begins; raised upon
twenty-four columns, each a guest.
all arrivals, this way
a lamp hold up
UPPER NEW YORK BAY
0 100 200 300 ft
MANNAHATTA
THE ISLAND AS A FIELD OF STANDING STORIES
DATUM: MEAN HARBOUR LIGHT · N.T.S.
PLATE
I

❦

Foreword

by the Keeper of the Accession Ledger

Every catalogue is a confession that the world is larger than the shelf. I have kept the Ledger of this School for thirty-one years, and I can tell you that the hardest thing to accession is not a book, nor a painting, nor even a child, who at least arrives with a name pinned to the coat. The hardest thing to accession is a column. A column will not lie flat. It refuses the drawer. It declines to be reduced to a card with a number, because a column, properly considered, is not an object in the room

but an argument the room is having with the sky — and you cannot file an argument. Yet here is the catalogue, and here am I, writing its first page against my better judgement and with my whole glad heart. The volume you are holding describes twenty-four columns. They stand — they are standing now, while you read this, in a long bright hall at the southern foot of the island of Mannahatta, where the streets give up their grid and run out into water. The columns are yellow. I want to be precise about the yellow, because visitors always ask, and because the painter Surjan, who is the author of these pages, would never forgive me a vague yellow. It is the yellow of the inside of an egg held up to a window. It is the yellow that the word morning would be if the word morning were a colour. It is, the children say, the colour of being glad on purpose. I should explain what the School is, since the catalogue assumes you already know, the way a host assumes you have found the door. The Sanctuary School is not a school in the sense the word has worn smooth. No one is examined here. No one fails. It is a school in the older, kinder sense — a place of leisure, a schole, a withdrawing-from-the-hour in order to be taught. What is taught is the island. Specifically, the children are taught that the island has always been a place that people came to, fleeing something, carrying something, and that the proof of this is structural: the building they are standing in cannot stand up without the stories. The columns hold the roof. The stories hold the columns. Remove a single tale and the Keeper would have to ask everyone, politely, to step outside while the slab came down. This is not a metaphor, or rather it is a metaphor that has been built, which is the only kind a builder respects. Each of the twenty-four columns is hollow. You may enter it the way you enter a confidence. Within, the wall curves up and away into a private weather of perforations — pinpricks that the noon sun finds and pours through, so that to stand inside a column at midday is to stand inside a small deliberate galaxy. A stair the colour of the column spirals up like a sentence that has decided to become a staircase. There are shelves, and the shelves hold the cargo: the things the guest of that column carried across the water, or carried up out of the ground, or carried in the mouth because the hands were full. And there is a pod, a soft yellow seat shaped like a comma, for the listener who arrives early and wishes to wait inside the story before the story begins. Surjan calls the columns guests. This was at first a difficulty for me, professionally, since a guest cannot be accessioned either; a guest is the one entity in a building that the building serves rather than owns. But I have come to see the wisdom. Each column carries the name and the manner of a person — or a people, or a season, or in two cases a particular kind of silence — that once found shelter on this island. The column named Anevay is the first to take the morning. The column named Threshold is hollow all the way through, so that it is less a column than a door that decided to bear weight. Between them stand twenty-two others, and the catalogue that follows is, simply, the guest list of the sky: an accounting of everything that has been asked to hold something up, and said yes. I am a Keeper, and Keepers are suspicious of joy, the way a quartermaster is suspicious of a soldier who is too cheerful before a march. Joy is expensive and it does not appear on the inventory. But I have watched these columns through thirty-one Septembers, and I will set down here, in the foreword where no one reads carefully, a thing I would not say aloud at the lectern: the joy is load-bearing. I have done the survey. I have laid the theodolite against the morning and measured the angle of the light coming off the yellow, and I tell you that on the days the hall is full of children the slab sits a little higher on its columns than on the days it is empty. The instruments insist. The gladness takes some of the weight. A word about the author, since you will spend a book in their company. Surjan is a painter who became an architect by refusing to choose, and a storyteller who became both by the

same refusal. They are, in the old grammar that the island taught itself slowly and is still learning, neither he nor she but a third upright thing, a person who stands like a column stands — bearing weight in two directions at once and calling it balance. I mention this not as a curiosity but as a key, because you cannot read this catalogue rightly if you think its central proposition is about buildings. Its central proposition is that a sanctuary is any structure, of stone or of grammar or of the human face, that has decided to make room. Surjan has spent a life making room. The School is only the largest room they have made so far. Of the method of the catalogue I will say little, since Surjan explains it in the Introduction with more charm than I can muster and fewer apologies. The columns are arranged in six suites of four, each suite gathered under a heading — Arrival, Memory, the Name, Shelter, the Tide, the Future — and between the suites you will find short passages set in a slanted hand. These are the Interludes. They record the questions the children asked while we walked, and the answers Surjan gave, and they are the truest part of the book, because a child will not let a beautiful sentence stand if it is also a false one. I have left them exactly as they were spoken. Where a child interrupts the Keeper's dignity, the dignity must yield. That is the house rule. Finally: a confession appropriate to a foreword, which is itself a confession that the book needed defending before it began. I did not want to like this catalogue. I am a man of the drawer and the card and the number, and Surjan's columns are a standing reproach to everything I have filed. But I have come to believe that the drawer is only the place we keep things until we are brave enough to let them stand up. This book lets them stand up. Twenty-four of them. Each holding a corner of a sky that would otherwise have nothing to lean on. Walk in. Mind the light; it is stronger than it looks. And do not be alarmed if, somewhere around the column named Querida or the column named Beacon, you feel the curious sensation of being, yourself, slightly load-bearing. You are. That is what the catalogue is for. I have one more thing to confess, and a foreword is the place for it, being the page a Keeper writes when the cataloguing is done and the drawers are shut and there is nothing left to do but admit what the work has done to him. Thirty-one years ago I came to this hall to measure it — to reduce its joy to figures, its columns to loads, its children to a maximum permitted occupancy. I have failed completely. The figures are all here, correct to the millimetre, and they have taught me nothing the children did not teach me faster and with more laughter. The instruments measure the weight on each column; they cannot measure why the columns agree to bear it. The theodolite finds the angle of the light; it has no setting for what the light is for. I have spent a career proving that a thing can be entirely accounted for and remain entirely mysterious, and I have come, in my last years here, to regard that as the most important finding of my life. Catalogue everything. Account for it all. And then stand in the doubled light with a child's cool hand on the yellow and admit that the sum of the accounting is smaller than the thing accounted for, and be — the word I am professionally forbidden and personally unable to avoid — glad. — B. Ferromonte Keeper of the Accession Ledger, the Sanctuary School written in the hall, at the hour the columns are most yellow

Introduction

by Surjan

I want to begin with the floor, because everyone begins with the columns and the columns are tired of it. The floor of the hall is poured, and polished, and pale as the inside of a shell, and it does a

thing that took me years to design and a single afternoon to understand: it gives the light back. When the morning comes in off the harbour through the tall glass and strikes the yellow of the columns, the floor receives that yellow and returns it, doubled, upward, so that the columns are lit from below as well as above and seem, for an hour, to be glowing of their own accord, as if gladness were a substance they were leaking. I built a floor that flatters the columns. This is the whole of my architecture and the whole of my ethics. Make a place that gives the light back. Everything else is detailing. You have been told, by the Keeper, who is a dear and dour man, what the School is. Let me tell you instead what it is for, because a building, like a person, is not explained by its blueprints but by its longings. The School is for teaching children that they live on a kept promise. The island under their pink shoes is not, whatever the maps insist, primarily a financial instrument. It is, and has been since before the word island arrived in any of the languages now spoken here, a place of coming-to. People have come to this narrow rock fleeing fire and fleeing famine and fleeing fathers and fleeing the particular fire that is other people's certainty about who you are allowed to be. They came across water, every one of them, because there is no coming to an island except across water, and water is the oldest teacher of the truth that you cannot bring everything; you must choose what to carry; the rest goes to the bottom and becomes the floor of the sea, which is also, if you think about it, a kind of polished pale surface that gives a certain light back. I am a painter. I say this so you will forgive my colours and distrust my facts. When I came to design the School, the commission was for a building, and I gave them a building, with all the things a building must have — egress and structure and a roof that holds the rain at a respectful distance. But I could not stop thinking about the verb to harbour. We say a harbour is a place ships come to. But we also say a person harbours a thought, harbours a hope, harbours a fugitive. The same word. To make a safe water and to keep a secret kindness: the language had already decided these were one act. So I designed a building that harbours in both senses. It sits at the lip of the actual harbour, where the ships once came. And it harbours, in its hollow columns, the thoughts and the hopes and the fugitives — the stories of everyone the island ever kept.

Here is the structural conceit, which the engineers hated and then loved, the way one comes to love a difficult truth. I refused to let the columns be merely structural. A column that only holds up a roof is a servant, and I will not build servants. So I made them hollow, and I put the stories inside, and I declared — on the drawings, in a note the building inspector circled in red and then, weeks later, uncircled — that the columns are held up by what is kept within them. This is true in the way that matters. A column with nothing inside it is just a tube of expensive material waiting to be justified. A column with a story inside it is a reason. The roof does not rest on the concrete. The roof rests on the fact that someone, once, was not turned away. I arranged the columns as a catalogue because I love catalogues the way some people love the sea — for their honesty about being unfinished. A catalogue never claims to be the world. It claims only to be a list of what was, on a particular afternoon, in a particular collection, able to be counted. The great cataloguer of cities, whose book I read until the spine gave out, understood that to describe fifty-five cities is to confess there are fifty-five thousand you have not described, and that the confession is the gift. So I give you twenty-four columns and I confess to you, gladly, in the first pages, that the island has held up far more than twenty-four kinds of person, that I have left out more guests than I have seated, and that the empty floor between the columns — that pale shining acreage where the children run — is not absence but invitation. The uncatalogued stand there. You may be one of them. The School has, I

assure you, a column-shaped space available, hollow and waiting, and the light is very good. A note on the children, since they are everywhere in these pages and everywhere in the hall, in their white and their pink, turning like slow weather across the floor. I did not put the children in the building as decoration. I put the building around the children as a sentence is put around a verb. They are what the structure is conjugating. When you read the Interludes — the slanted passages where a child stops me mid-flight to ask whether a column can be lonely, or whether the harbour remembers, or why the yellow does not run out — you are reading the load-test of every idea in this book. A story that cannot survive a seven-year-old's plain face was not strong enough to hold up a roof, and I have cut it. What remains has passed. The children are my building inspectors. They circle things in red. Then, sometimes, they uncircle them. I should say a word about myself, because the Keeper has said one and his was kind but had the shape of a label, and labels, however gentle, are small drawers, and I have spent my life climbing out of small drawers. I am neither the one thing nor the other. I have been called a great many nouns and I have come to think of myself as a verb — as harbouring, in the active voice, ongoing, present tense. I tell you this not to instruct you in my pronouns, though the island is slowly learning them and I am proud of my slow island, but because it is the secret engine of the whole design. I built a sanctuary because I needed one, and because in needing one I understood the island as a fellow-needer, a place that had itself been a refuge so many times that refuge had become its deepest nature, deeper than commerce, deeper than the grid. The island and I are the same kind of upright thing. We bear weight in two directions and call it balance. We make room because room was once made for us, narrowly, and at the last possible moment, by someone who could have said no and said, instead, yes, there is space, come, the light is very good. And so to the radical proposition, which I will state plainly here in the introduction so that it cannot be said I hid it in the architecture. The proposition is joy. Not happiness, which is weather, but joy, which is structure. I believe — I have built my belief, you may walk through it — that joy is the correct response to having been kept. That the proper thing to do upon discovering you were not turned away is to become, yourself, a place that does not turn others away, and to do so gladly, conspicuously, in a colour visible from the harbour. The columns are yellow because I will not whisper this. I will not build a tasteful grey sanctuary that apologizes for its own mercy. I have built mercy the colour of the inside of an egg held up to a window, twenty-four storeys of it, glowing from a floor that gives the light back, and I have filled it with children who are learning that they live on a kept promise and that the keeping is now, partly, theirs. Read the catalogue however you like. Read it in order, suite by suite, and you will walk the hall the way the children walk it, from Arrival in the bright south corner to the Future where the glass looks out on the park and the towers and the unhurried trees. Or open it at random, the way you would push open the nearest column and step into whichever story was waiting, which is also a true way to learn an island. The columns do not mind the order. They have all agreed to hold up the same sky. That is the only agreement a sanctuary requires: not that the guests be alike, only that they each take a corner of the weight, and stand, and let the light come up off the floor and find them, and be — there is no other word and I have stopped looking for one — glad. — S. the hall, a morning in the keeping season

Dramatis Columnae The twenty-four guests of the hall, in the order the morning reaches them. A column, the painter insists, is a character before it is a support; what it holds up is merely its occupation, while what it holds within is its life. The reader who wishes to be introduced before the telling begins may consult the typology that follows — a survey of profiles, each as distinct as a face

— and may return to it whenever a column's manner is forgotten, as one returns to the front of a long novel to recall who married whom.

PLATE IV. Dramatis Columnae — a typology of the twenty-four, each a character, not to scale.

They are, in their suites: in Arrival, the columns Anevay, Maïsha, Pomander, and Tacit; in Memory, Vesper, Mnemo, Saudade, and Halcyon; in the Name, Bashert, Querida, Wepwawet, and Solace; in Shelter, Ferdinand, Nokomis, Tindra, and Eulogia; in the Tide, Refugio, Ashreï, Sōlas, and Marigold; and in the Future, Quietude, Beacon, Liesel, and Threshold. The morning, who is no respecter of catalogues, visits them in roughly this order and then begins again.

How to Walk the Hall a few instructions from Surjan, easily ignored

There is a right way to walk the hall, and it is the way the morning walks it, which is to say slowly, sunwise, and without a destination. The visitor who comes to the Sanctuary School the way one comes to a museum — to see it, to tick it off, to consume its columns in a brisk educational circuit and depart improved — will get from it precisely nothing, will find it a pleasant yellow room with some odd hollow pillars, and will leave wondering what the fuss was about. The hall does not yield to the brisk. It yields, like every true sanctuary, only to the unhurried, and so the first instruction, the one that contains all the others, is this: do not be in a hurry. You did not, presumably, cross a cold ocean to get here. The least you can do, having arrived so easily, is to slow down to the pace of those who did not. Begin at Anevay, where the morning begins, in the bright south corner, and let the building teach you its only rhythm: stop, enter, attend, ask, move on. At each column, stop — fully, with your feet still and your weight settled, the way a column stops, bearing its load without fidgeting. Then enter, for a column you have not gone inside is a column you have only met at a party, all surface and no confidence; the story is within, in the hollow, where the perforated light comes alive over your head. Then attend — to the cargo on the shelves, the chosen-name cards, the kept lamps, the moulded hands, whatever that particular guest has carried across whatever water — and attend, too, to what the column does to the light and the sound and the temperature of your own held breath. Then ask. The columns are listeners first; they are built to receive a question; and the visitor who passes through the whole hall without once asking it anything has treated a conversation as a lecture and will have learned, accordingly, only what they already knew. You may, if you prefer, walk the hall the other way — not in order, but at random, pushing open whichever column stands nearest and stepping into whichever story is waiting. This is also a true way, perhaps the truer, for it is how arrival actually works: no one crosses the water to a curated sequence; they wash up where the tide leaves them, in whatever neighbourhood has a room, beside whatever neighbour happens to be home, and they make sense of the whole island afterward, backward, out of the accident of where they first stood. To walk the hall at random is to honour the randomness of every arrival, and the children, left to themselves, always walk it this way, careening from Marigold to Tacit to Beacon with no logic but delight, and getting, I suspect, more of the building than the orderly adult who insists on starting at the start. The catalogue is numbered for the convenience of the timid. The brave may scatter.

However you walk it, end at Threshold — this is the one instruction I will not soften — and stand inside the open column and look out through it at the harbour and the open water and the far line where the next ships are always coming, and feel the wind move through, and let the building say to you the thing it has been building toward all along: that you are not finished, that the sanctuary is

not finished, that a quarter of the sky is still yours to hold, and that the only way out of the hall, as out of the column called Wepwawet, is together — turning to hold the door for whoever is behind you, carrying out what you were given, becoming, in your own life, the held door you came through. Then leave. Walk back out across the floor that gives the light back, into the loud bright unhurried-for-once city, and begin the long glad work of building, out there, with whatever you have, the real columns, of which these yellow ones are only the rehearsal.

Prologue

: The Teller Enters the Hall

We come in out of the harbour wind, the children and I, and the hall takes us the way a held breath takes a swimmer — all at once, and warmer than expected. There are forty of them this morning, give or take a runner, in their good clothes, the pink and the white, because a visit to the columns is an occasion and their grandmothers know it even when the children do not. They stop just inside the glass. They always stop. It is not the size of the place that stops them, though it is large; it is the light. The columns are already glowing — that doubled light, down from the perforations and up from the floor — and a child who has never seen it will stand quite still for a moment and then, without being told, lower their voice. Wonder does this. It is the only authority I trust. "Are they hot?" asks a small one near my knee, meaning the columns, meaning the yellow, which does look, I admit, as though it might be warm to the touch like a stove or a sleeping animal. I tell her to go and see. She lays her palm flat against the nearest shaft — it is the column called Anevay, the first to take the morning — and her face does the thing I built the whole building to make faces do. "It's cool," she reports, betrayed and delighted. "It's cool like a window." Yes. The yellow is the warmth of morning and the temperature of glass, and the contradiction is the first lesson, though I never say so. A sanctuary feels warm and keeps a cool head. That is how it survives long enough to be warm to anyone. I should tell you how the telling goes, since you are coming with us. We walk the hall in a slow spiral, sunwise, the way the morning itself moves through the columns, and at each column we stop, and I open it — they are not locked; the latch is only a story you have to know to find — and the children go in, as many as will fit, and the rest crowd the doorway, and inside the small galaxy of perforations comes alive over our heads, and I tell them whose column this is. Whose guest. What that guest carried across the water, or up out of the ground, and how the island made room. And then the children ask me something I did not expect, and the column writes it down — for the columns are listeners first and supports only second — and we move on, leaving the question standing there to hold up its corner of the roof. One more thing before we begin, since you are new and the children are not, and I would not have you lost among them. You will notice, as we walk, that I speak of the columns as though they could hear — that I say a column keeps a story, listens to a question, agrees to bear its load. I am aware this is a way of speaking. I am a builder; I know what concrete is and is not. But I have learned, in thirty years of telling, that the way of speaking is also a way of seeing, and that a child who is taught to regard a column as a guest rather than a girder will grow up to regard a stranger as a guest rather than a threat, and that this transfer — from the way we speak of buildings to the way we treat people — is not decoration but the entire curriculum, smuggled in past the child's defences inside a story about a yellow pillar. So when I tell you that Anevay takes the morning gently

so that the others may have it second-hand and softened, believe me a little, even knowing better. The believing is the lesson. The lesson is the load. And the load, believe me or not, is somehow, measurably, borne. There are twenty-four. We will not reach them all before the grandmothers come, and that is correct; you are not meant to finish a sanctuary in a morning. But we will reach enough. Come. Mind the floor — it is brighter than it looks, and a child has been known to chase their own reflection clear across the hall believing it a second, shyer child who lives down in the shine. Take my hand if you like. I am the Teller. I am neither the one thing nor the other, which makes me an excellent guide to a building that is also neither, being both a structure and a sentence, both a harbour and the act of harbouring. Here is the first column. It was here, the island says, before the rest of us learned to stand. Its name is Anevay, and it takes the morning so that the others may have it gently, second-hand, already softened. Put your hand on it. Feel how it keeps a cool head. Now. Listen.

Suite the First

Columns & Arrival In which we consider the columns that hold the morning, and the guests who came across water to a narrow rock that had been waiting, without knowing it was waiting, to make room.

I. Anevay

Before the others, Anevay. The name is older than the building and was lent to the column by the ground, which had it first. You must understand that the island did not begin as real estate; it began as many hills, that is what its oldest name says, an island of many hills, and water on every side, and a people who did not arrive here because they were already the place's own answer to the question the place was asking. Anevay holds that. Anevay is the column of the before — before the grid drew its straight lines over the curved land, before the word property came across the water in a Dutch mouth, before any of the arrivals that the other twenty-three columns commemorate. Anevay commemorates the ground that did the receiving. Inside Anevay there are no shelves. This shocks the children, who have learned to expect cargo. But the guest of this column carried nothing across any water, because the guest of this column is the water's far shore itself, the land, which carries everything and is therefore not seen to carry. In place of shelves there is a single low bench of the same poured pale stone as the floor, and on it nothing, and the nothing is the point. Sit, I tell the children, and they sit, and the perforations come on overhead, and I say: this is the oldest sanctuary. Not the building. The ground the building stands on. Everyone who ever came to this island was made welcome first by this — by the simple structural fact that there was somewhere to stand. The hills are gone now, mostly, shaved flat to make the streets agreeable to carts, but Anevay remembers their shape the way your tongue remembers a tooth that has been pulled. When the morning comes off the harbour it strikes Anevay first, being the southmost and the oldest, and for a moment — I have measured it, the Keeper laughed at me but I have measured it — the column throws a shadow in the shape of a hill that no longer exists, a soft mounded shadow utterly unlike the column that casts it, as if the light, passing through the memory inside, were bent toward the original form of the land. The children chase the hill-shadow. They cannot catch it; it is made of subtraction. But they learn its name, and a hill that is chased by children is not entirely gone. "What did the ground get," a child once asked me, "for holding everybody up?" It is the right question and I gave the only honest

answer. Mostly it got forgotten, I said. Mostly the arrivals stood on it and looked up at the sky they meant to make something of and did not look down at what was making the standing possible. That is the usual fate of the load-bearing. But not here. Here we built a column the colour of morning and gave it the first light and no cargo at all, only a bench, so that the first thing a child learns in this hall is to thank the ground. Anevay is how the building says I know what I am standing on. Every sanctuary should know what it is standing on. The ones that forget become, in time, the very thing their guests once fled.

II. Maïsha

Not every arrival is a choice, and Maïsha is the column that refuses to pretend otherwise. Her name means life, in a language carried here in the hold of ships by people who were cargo — who did not cross the water as guests but as goods, in the obscene grammar of that traffic, and who performed across the generations the most stubborn and luminous act in the island's whole history: they took an arrival meant to erase them, and they made life of it. They became the city's music and its mathematics and its mercy. Maïsha holds this, and Maïsha is, by the Keeper's survey, the strongest column in the hall. The slab leans on her hardest. She does not seem to notice the weight. People who have carried what cannot be carried develop a particular relationship to load. Her shelves are not behind glass. I made that decision early and defended it against curators who wanted to protect the cargo. The cargo of Maïsha must be touchable, because it was made by hands for hands: a fiddle, a folded apron, a child's first reader with the spine taped, a tin of buttons each of which was once the only round bright thing in a pocket. There was, on this island, a village — Seneca, they called it, up where the great park now lies — a place that free people built for themselves, with churches and gardens and a school, a sanctuary made by the very people the wider city kept trying not to make room for. The city took it back to make a lawn. Maïsha keeps the village. Not as a grievance — though the grievance is just and I will not sand it smooth — but as a proof: that the kept can become keepers, that people given no room will build room, will plant gardens on the rock, will raise a school where none was offered them. The first Sanctuary School on this island was not mine. It was theirs, and it was taken, and Maïsha stands so that it is not also forgotten. The children love Maïsha because she sings. This is not poetry; it is acoustics, though the two are cousins. The hollow of the column is tuned — I tuned it, with a man who builds the insides of cellos — so that a voice raised inside it comes back fuller, warmer, joined by its own overtones, so that one child singing in Maïsha sounds like three, like a small choir of their possible selves. They go in alone and come out having heard themselves multiplied. That, I tell them, is what this island did with the life it was given by the people it most wronged: it heard them, and the hearing came back multiplied, and the city has been singing in borrowed overtones ever since and mostly forgetting whose voice it borrowed. Maïsha remembers. Sing in her once and you will never again believe you sing alone.

I will tell you the turn, the thing that makes Maïsha not a monument but a guest. A monument asks for silence and a bowed head. Maïsha asks for life — that is her whole name and her whole instruction. She does not want to be mourned in. She wants to be sung in, danced near, made glad against. The deepest respect you can pay to those who turned an arrival of horror into a city of music is to be, in their column, unmistakably and defiantly alive. The children know this without my telling. They never whisper in Maïsha. They sing. And the slab, leaning its great weight on her, is held up not

by concrete but by the refusal of the cargoed to be only cargo — held up, that is, by life, which is the strongest material I have ever built with and the only one I would trust with a sky.

III. Pomander

Now the column of the carried scent. A pomander is a little pierced sphere of fragrance that travellers once carried against the bad air of strange places, a portable atmosphere, a way of bringing the smell of home into the nose so that the nose, at least, need not emigrate. Pomander the column is pierced all over with the most perforations of any in the hall — she is more hole than wall, the Keeper frets about it — and through the piercings comes not only light but, on certain mornings when the ventilation is set just so, scent: cardamom, orange peel, the green sharpness of crushed herb stems, the particular dust of dried roses. I will not tell you how it is done. A magician who explains the trick has merely a trick; one who keeps the secret has a sanctuary. The guests of Pomander are everyone who arrived carrying a smell. They are legion. Up the narrow streets to the east of here, where the tenements once stood shoulder to shoulder like books too tightly shelved, the arrivals from a hundred elsewheres unpacked their bundles, and the first thing out of every bundle, before the documents, before the daguerreotype of the grandmother, was the food — the seed saved in a hem, the starter for the bread kept alive against all customs inspection, the spice that cost a week's wage and weighed nothing and meant everything. They could not carry the house. They could not carry the hill or the river or the particular slant of light through the particular tree. But they could carry the smell of the kitchen, and so they did, and they cooked it here, and the smell of the kitchen, rising from ten thousand windows, became the actual air of the island, until now you cannot take a breath in this city that is not a refugee's recipe. I built Pomander to teach the children that arrival is olfactory before it is anything else, that you know you have made a place home when it begins to smell like your grandmother's hands. Inside the column the shelves hold not books but jars, and the jars hold not specimens but gifts — for any child may add to Pomander, may bring a pinch of whatever their own kitchen smells of, and seal it in a jar with their name, and shelve it among the others. The column grows more fragrant every year. It is the only exhibit in the hall that is also a pantry, the only guest who is fed by the visitors rather than feeding them, and this reversal is deliberate. We are taught that the arrival must be grateful to the place. Pomander teaches the place to be grateful for the arrival — for the spice it could not have grown, the recipe it could not have invented, the smell it did not know it was missing until a stranger, newly landed and homesick, opened a bundle and made the whole island hungry. A child asked me once whether the smell would ever run out. A good fear; everything portable seems like it must run out. No, I told her. This is the strange economics of the carried scent: it multiplies in the sharing. The grandmother who taught you the recipe did not have less of it for teaching you; she had a granddaughter who could cook. The island is not diminished by the thousand kitchens it absorbed; it is the richest-smelling rock on the earth. Pomander will not run out because fragrance, unlike gold, increases when spent. Spend it, I tell them. Add your jar. Make the column too fragrant for its own shelves. There is no such thing, in a true sanctuary, as too welcome.

IV. Tacit

And the column of the unspoken. Tacit is the quietest guest in the hall and the hardest to catalogue, because Tacit's story is told without words, and a catalogue is made of nothing else. The

guests of this column are all the arrivals who came without the language — who stood at the desk of the official and could not say their own need, who learned the new tongue slowly and painfully or never, who lived whole lives here in a silence the loud city mistook for emptiness. The city is always mistaking silence for emptiness. It is the city's most expensive error. Tacit corrects it, wordlessly, which is the only way the correction would be true. Inside Tacit there are no inscriptions, no labels, no shelves of named cargo. There is, instead, a wall you may touch, moulded all over in low relief with the shapes of hands — hands making the signs that hands make when mouths cannot: the hand laid flat on the heart, the two hands opening like a book, the fingers that mean home, the fingers that mean help, the fingers that mean thank you, the fingers that mean I am still here. The deaf came to this island and made of it a place where the eye could hear; the speechless-with-fear came and learned that a meal offered needs no grammar; the ones whose language no one here had ever met came and discovered that welcome has a face and the face is universal and the face was, against all their terror, turned toward them. Tacit keeps the vocabulary of the wordless welcome. The children learn three signs in this column. They never forget them. You cannot forget a word you keep in your hands. There is a Quaker silence in Tacit too, the held quiet of the meeting where the sanctuary was the stillness itself, where people who would not swear oaths and would not bear arms and would not turn away the hunted sat together in a silence so full it had to be called worship. They harboured the fleeing in that silence, on this island and up its river, said nothing that could be testified to, and by saying nothing said the largest thing: we will not give you up. Some sanctuaries are loud and yellow, like mine. Some are silent and grey and sit very still and do not even tell you they are saving your life. Tacit honours the second kind, which is the harder kind, and the kind less likely to get a column, except that I gave it one, the slimmest and the stillest, so that the loud bright hall would have at its heart a held breath, a deliberate quiet, a guest who proves that you can make enormous room and never raise your voice. "How do we know what Tacit is saying," a careful child asked me, "if it doesn't use words?" I knelt down to her level, which is the correct level for the truest answers. We don't always know, I said. That is the lesson of Tacit and it is a hard one even for grown people. Sometimes someone arrives with a need they cannot say and we cannot understand, and the temptation is to decide that because we cannot understand it, it is not real. Tacit is here so that we never decide that. When you cannot understand the language of a need, I told her, you do not get to call the need empty. You get to make room anyway, on faith, the way you would leave a light on for a guest whose face you have not yet seen. She thought about this. Then she went and laid her small hand against the moulded wall, fitting her fingers into the shape that means I am still here, and she held it there a long time, saying nothing, which was, I think, exactly right.

Interlude

At the Turning of the First Suite A child who had been quiet through all of Arrival took my sleeve as we left Tacit and asked, in the tone children use for the questions they have been saving: "Are the columns sad?" I said: Why do you ask? She said: "Because the stories are sad. The ground got forgotten. The village got taken. The people came in chains. The quiet people couldn't even say what they needed. I thought this was a happy place. The yellow looks happy." I sat down on the floor, which surprised her, grown people not generally sitting on floors, and she sat too, and the other children gathered the way iron filings gather, and I told them the thing I most want them to carry out

of this hall. The stories are sad in their middles, I said, almost all of them, because the middle of every sanctuary story is the thing the guest was fleeing, and the things people flee are terrible, and I will not lie to you about that, because you are the building inspectors and you circle lies in red. But look where the stories are kept. They are kept inside columns the colour of morning, in a hall full of light that comes up off the floor, in a building that cannot stand without them. The sadness is the middle. The keeping is the end. And the keeping is glad. The quiet child considered this. Then she said: "So the yellow isn't pretending." No, I said. The yellow is not pretending. The yellow is what it looks like when sad things are finally, completely safe. She nodded, satisfied in the deep way children are satisfied when an adult has told them the truth and trusted them to hold it. Then she ran off to chase her reflection across the floor, glad and load-bearing, and we went on to the columns of Memory.

Suite the Second

Columns & Memory In which we consider the columns that hold what was left behind, for an arrival is also a departure seen from the other shore, and the guest who comes carrying a country must put it somewhere, and these are the columns where it is kept.

V. Vesper

Vesper is the evening column, though the hall has no evening — it shuts before the light goes — and this is the first of Vesper's gentle paradoxes. Her name is the evening star and the evening prayer at once, the hour when the day's arrivals pause and the heart turns, unbidden, toward what is no longer near: the village left, the dead unburied because there was no time, the door of a house that is now another family's door or no door at all, only a field. Every arrival carries an evening inside it, a permanent dusk over the abandoned place, and Vesper is where the children learn that this dusk is not a wound to be healed but a room to be visited, kept lit, and left again. Inside Vesper, the perforations are arranged not at random, as in the other columns, but in the actual constellations — the night sky as it stands over this latitude — so that to enter Vesper at noon is to stand under the stars of the island's own evening, pricked in light through the yellow. But here is Vesper's deeper craft: the constellations slowly turn, over the course of the day, by a mechanism the children are never shown, so that the guest who lingers sees the sky wheel as it wheels at night, and understands, bodily, that the same stars that stand over this island stand also over the abandoned village, the left country, the far field — that the sky is the one possession no emigrant has ever had to leave behind, the one address that did not change. The homesick on this island looked up and saw the stars of home, because the stars are too high to belong to any country. Vesper keeps that consolation. It is the oldest one. It is free, and it works. The shelves of Vesper hold letters. Not the originals — those are too frail — but faithful copies, in the original hands, of the letters the arrived sent back across the water to the not-yet-arrived: come, or do not come; it is hard here, or it is better than they say; I have found work, I have found nothing, I have found a person, I think of you at evening. Whole lives are in the shelves of Vesper, the entire literature of departure, written by people who would never call themselves writers and who wrote, under the pressure of distance, the most honest prose the island has ever produced. The children cannot read most of the letters — the languages are too many — but they hold them, and they understand the gesture, which needs no translation: someone, far from home and missing it at evening, sat down and tried to keep the connection alive with the only thread

available, which was words, sent slowly across water, arriving weeks late, read by lamplight, kept forever. Memory is a correspondence. Vesper is the post office of the kept. A child asked whether it was sad to miss a place you could never go back to. I told her about the evening star, which is also the morning star, the same bright planet seen at the two ends of the dark, called by two names because we forget, between dusk and dawn, that the thing that sets is the thing that rises. What you miss at evening, I said, you will find you carry into morning. The village you left is not behind you; it is inside you, and everything you build here will have its shape pressed faintly into the foundation, the way a leaf leaves its print in stone. You did not lose the place. You became the place's way of continuing. Vesper is sad the way the evening is sad — briefly, beautifully, and with the morning already, secretly, on its way.

VI. Mnemo

If Vesper is the post office, Mnemo is the library, and the most heavily laden column in the hall — shelves from floor to vanishing, spiralling up the inner wall with the stair, so that to climb Mnemo is to climb through a paper weather of every book the island's guests carried, wrote, or could not stop reading. Her name is memory itself, the mother of the muses in the old reckoning, the faculty without which there is no art, no grief, and no welcome, for welcome is only memory turned outward: I remember being a stranger, therefore I make room for the stranger. The whole moral architecture of the sanctuary rests, structurally, on Mnemo. Forget that you were once a guest and you will become a gate. The island built, in its better century, a great library — not this one; a vast one, with lions out front and a room like an inverted ship where anyone at all, with no card, no fee, no question asked about where they were born, could come in out of the weather and read. This was, and is, a sanctuary of the purest kind, and the children are always astonished when I tell them it asks nothing. Nothing? Nothing. Not your name, not your nation, not your reason. The library is the island's promise made legible: that knowledge is a commons, that the door is open, that the warm room and the free book are a right and not a charity. Mnemo keeps the spirit of that room. The shelves are real books and the children may take one down and read it on the spiralling stair, and no one will ask them anything at all, and this small experience of the unconditional — of being trusted with a book merely for being a child in a building — does more to raise a generous person than any lesson I could devise. The cargo of Mnemo is reading itself, the most portable home ever devised. A book is a country you can fold and carry through any customs; a story learned by heart cannot be confiscated; the people who came to this island with nothing came, very often, with everything, because they had committed their literature to memory in the languages the new place did not yet know it would need. They recited their epics on the tenement stairs. They taught their children the verses on the long evenings. They translated, slowly, lovingly, badly and then beautifully, until the island's own library swelled with the smuggled masterpieces of a hundred elsewheres, and the city that thought it was giving the immigrants a culture discovered it had been given one, immeasurably enriched, by the very arrivals it had condescended to. Mnemo holds the smuggled libraries. She is the proof that the most valuable thing crossing any border is always the one the inspectors cannot see, because it is folded up inside a person, in the place where the memory keeps the songs. Climb Mnemo to the top — the children race to — and you come out into the bell, the wide flared head of the column where it catches the slab, and here the perforations are densest, a true firmament, and here, fixed to the curved inner

ceiling where you must lie on your back to read it, is a single line, the only inscription in the whole hall, which I will not reproduce here because it must be earned by the climb. I will say only that it concerns the relationship between remembering and making room, and that it has made more than one grandmother, lying on her back beside her grandchild at the top of a yellow column, weep in the particular way of someone who has just been told, in seven words, the meaning of their entire difficult life. Memory is not the past. Memory is the future's instructions for being kind. Mnemo holds them at the top, where you must climb to read, because the most important things should cost a little effort and reward it with the whole sky.

VII. Saudade

There is a word in the language of the sea-faring people who were among the first to cross to this island in numbers — a word that does not survive translation and is therefore the truest thing in this catalogue, since the truest things are exactly those that cannot be carried whole across the water of another tongue. The word is saudade, and it names the presence of an absence: the love that remains for what is gone, the sweetness in the missing, the way longing for a thing can become, over years, more precious than the thing itself was. Saudade the column holds this, and Saudade is, I think, the most beautiful of the twenty-four, though the Keeper says beauty is not a category one may accession and I say that is exactly why I built a whole column to it. The first of these arrivals came a very long time ago, fleeing a fire of certainty in their old country — the certainty that there was only one permitted way to pray, and that they, praying otherwise, must convert or burn or run. They ran. Across an ocean, then another, from a refuge that turned them out to a refuge that turned them out, until a handful of them — the number is small enough to hold in the mind, a couple of dozen souls, weary past speech — arrived at this island, then a rough Dutch trading post, and asked to stay. They were nearly refused. The man in charge wished to refuse them. And then — this is the hinge on which Saudade turns, and the children always go quiet here — he was overruled, from across the water, by his own masters, who told him, in effect: let them stay; they have nowhere else; that is reason enough. And they stayed. And from that handful of the nearly-refused grew, in time, a community, a congregation, a thread in the island's rope that has never since been cut. The island became a sanctuary at the precise moment someone with the power to refuse was told that nowhere else to go is, by itself, sufficient grounds for yes. Saudade keeps that yes, and keeps also the longing the yes did not cure, for they never saw their old country again, and they missed it, and the missing did not fade but ripened. The shelves of Saudade hold the objects of ripened longing: a key to a house that no longer stands, kept for six generations and handed down with the instruction to keep it; a recipe for a sweet eaten only on a holiday in a town no one living has seen; a single pressed flower whose name is lost but whose grandmother is remembered. These are not sad objects, though the children expect them to be. They are saudade objects — proof that what we love does not require our return in order to remain ours, that you can keep a country in a key, a town in a sweetness, a grandmother in a flower, and that the keeping is not a failure to move on but the highest form of moving on: carrying the loved place forward into the new one, so that the new place is built, partly, out of the love left over from the old. I told the children the secret of saudade, which is the secret of all the columns of Memory and perhaps of the whole hall. The opposite of loss, I said, is not having. The opposite of loss is love that outlasts the thing it loved. When you lose a place and go on loving it,

you have not lost; you have transmuted. You have turned a country into a feeling, which is lighter to carry and cannot be taken at any border, and which you can then give away, endlessly, the way the people of Saudade gave their longing to this island until the island itself learned to feel it — until this loud commercial rock developed, against all expectation, a soul made largely of other people's homesickness, ripened into love, and spent, generously, in the building of a place where the next handful of the nearly-refused might hear someone say, from across whatever water: let them stay; they have nowhere else; that is reason enough.

VIII. Halcyon

We end the suite of Memory with its gentlest guest. Halcyon is named for the legendary bird that nested on the winter sea, and for whose nesting the gods were said to calm the waters — the original halcyon days, the brief charmed calm in the heart of the storm season. The guests of this column are all those who came to the island carrying the memory not of horror but of peace — the remembered calm from before the war, the before-times that the fled-from place once was, the good years that existed and were real and were destroyed and must, against the propaganda of grief, be remembered as good and not retroactively darkened by the catastrophe that followed. Halcyon is the column that protects the happy memory from the unhappy ending. This is harder than it sounds and more important than it seems.

For there is a cruelty grief plays on the mind: it reaches backward and stains the bright days with the dark one, so that the survivor cannot remember the laughter without the loss that came after, and the whole good past is poisoned by its ending. Halcyon refuses this. The shelves hold only the calm: the photograph of the picnic before anyone knew, the song that meant only a wedding and not yet a lament, the toy from a childhood that was, for a while, simply a childhood. The island filled, in its hard centuries, with people who had every reason to remember their old lives as nightmares, and many did. But many also performed the harder, braver act: they kept the halcyon. They told their children, before all this, we were happy; the orchard was real; the music was real; the long gold afternoons were real; do not let them take the afternoons as well as everything else. And the children believed them, and the calm was kept, and a person who can keep one true halcyon memory through any storm has a sanctuary no army can burn, because it is made of an afternoon, and afternoons, once truly had, are indestructible. Inside Halcyon the light is different — softer, golder, for I glazed the perforations of this column with a faint amber, so that the noon entering becomes late-afternoon, the gold of four o'clock in summer, the most peaceful light there is. The children grow calm in Halcyon without knowing why. They lower their voices, slow their hands, sit in the comma-shaped pod and go quiet, bathed in a borrowed four o'clock. I built it as a place to rest in the middle of the telling, a charmed calm in the heart of the long morning, a halcyon hour for the small storm-tossed souls who have just heard eight true stories with sad middles and need, before they hear sixteen more, to remember that calm is also real, also true, also memorable — that the afternoon happened, and can be returned to, and is, in the deepest sense, theirs to keep. A child asked me, drowsy in the amber light, whether the calm was a memory or a wish. Both, I said, and that is the bird's secret. The halcyon nests on the sea in winter; it makes its calm in the worst season, out of nothing but its own insistence; the calm is real because it is insisted upon. Your peaceful memory and your hope for peace are the same bird seen at two moments of its flight. Remember the calm and you make it; make the

calm and you will have it to remember. This is not a trick of the mind. It is the mind's one true power, the only thing it can do that the storm cannot undo. Keep your halcyon, I told the drowsy child. Nest on the winter sea. Insist on the afternoon. And she did, right there, falling for a moment into the small bright sleep of the perfectly safe, while the column held up the roof and the gold light held up the child and the whole arrangement held, as it has held for thirty-one Septembers, against the weather of the world outside the glass.

Interlude

A Question About the Yellow Between the suites a boy asked the question I wait for every time, the question the whole building is an answer to, though I never answer it the same way twice. He asked: "Why is it yellow? Why not a normal colour?" I asked him what a normal colour would be. He thought hard. "Grey," he said. "Or like, beige. Serious colours. This is the colour of a duck." It is, I admitted, very much the colour of a duck. And of an egg yolk, and of a school bus, and of the middle of a daisy, and of the light at the exact moment the sun clears the harbour. I asked him why he thought serious places were grey. "Because serious things are sad," he said, with the terrible clarity of the young, "and sad is grey." Here, I said, is the most radical thing I will tell you all morning, so lean in. Some people believe that to take suffering seriously you must be grey about it — solemn, hushed, the colour of a rainy Tuesday. They build their memorials grey and their churches dim and they speak of hard things in low voices, and there is a place for that; Tacit is grey at heart and Tacit is holy. But I believe something else, and I built a whole yellow building to believe it out loud. I believe that the most serious response to suffering is joy — not the forgetting of the suffering, but the defiant building, on top of it and because of it, of something glad. The people in these columns suffered greyly. The right monument to them is not more grey. It is the brightest thing the eye can bear. It is the colour of the morning they fled toward. Anyone can be solemn about pain. It takes a real spine to be yellow about it. The boy looked at the columns for a while. Then he said: "So the yellow is the brave colour." The bravest, I said. Greys are easy. Anyone can match the weather. To be yellow in a grey world — to be glad on purpose, in public, in honour of the people who taught you how — that is the whole curriculum of this school, and you have just passed it. He grinned, enormously, and ran to tell the others he had found out why, and I let him, because he had.

Suite the Third

Columns & the Name In which we consider the columns that hold what a person is called, and what they call themselves, for the first gift a sanctuary gives is to ask your name and the second, greater gift is to let you answer.

IX. Bashert

Bashert is a word from the language of the people who came up these streets in their hundreds of thousands, and it means meant to be — destined, fated, the thing that was always going to find you, usually said of a beloved but applicable, the wise ones knew, to any rightness that arrives looking like accident. Bashert the column holds the strange grace of the changed name. For this is what happened to the arrivals, by the boatload, at the desks of the harbour officials: their names, too long

or too foreign or too quickly said, were misheard, misspelled, shortened, flattened, sometimes simply replaced, so that a person stepped off the boat as one name and walked into the city as another, renamed by a tired clerk who could not spell the truth of them. This was a violence, and I will not pretend it was not; to lose your name is to lose the handle by which your ancestors could find you. But Bashert holds the other half of the truth, the half that is harder and brighter. For some — not all, but some, and their stories are the ones this column keeps — the lost name made room for a found one. The clerk's error became, over a life, a destiny: the flattened name grew its own dignity, the children bore it proudly, and looking back from the far end of a good life the renamed would say, it was bashert — it was meant — that I should arrive as one person and become another, for the person I became could only have been born on this side of the water, under this new name, in this new light. Bashert keeps the names that were lost and the lives that were found, and holds them not as a wound and a consolation but as a single thing: the truth that you are not only your inheritance; you are also your arrival; and sometimes the second name is the one that was, all along, waiting. The shelves of Bashert are a registry — not of the official names, the ones the clerks wrote, but of the true names, the ones the families kept at home, in the old tongue, whispered over the children at night so they would not forget who they also were. For this is the deepest craft of the renamed: they kept both. They answered to the clerk's name in the street and the grandmother's name at the table, and they were not diminished by the doubling but enlarged — two-named, hyphen-souled, fluent in their own translation. The children of this island are, so many of them, people with a public name and a kitchen name, a name for the new country and a name for the old, and Bashert teaches them that this is not confusion but wealth: to be called two true things is to be twice findable, twice loved, a person with a sanctuary in each language. I knelt with a child in Bashert and she told me, shyly, that she had two names — the one on her school papers and the one her grandmother used, which no one at school could say. Which is the real one, she wanted to know. Both, I told her, and you are bashert, you are meant, in both. The name your grandmother uses is the one that knows where you come from. The name your teacher uses is the one that knows where you are going. A whole person needs both directions. Never let anyone tell you to choose; a sanctuary that makes you choose between your names is no sanctuary at all. She asked me which kind I was, two-named or one. I told her I was a person who had chosen my own name, which is a third kind, and the rarest, and that I would tell her about it at the column called Solace, if she could wait. She could. Children can wait for the truth if you promise it is coming.

X. Querida

Querida means dear one, beloved, in the language that came north to this island from the warm islands and the long isthmus and the great southern continent — the language of querida, mija, corazón, the language extravagantly rich in endearments, as if its speakers had decided, against all the evidence of history, that the most important thing one person can do to another is call them dear. Querida the column holds the sanctuary that is hidden inside an endearment. For there is a shelter made entirely of how we address each other, a roof built of the good names we call the people we love, and it keeps out a particular weather — the cold of being no one's dear — that has killed more souls than any literal winter. The guests of Querida came to a city that often could not be bothered to learn their names at all, that called them by their function — the busboy, the seamstress, the man who

delivers — or by slurs, or by nothing, looking through them as through clean glass. And in the face of that erasure they built, in their own neighbourhoods, up in the heights and over the river and in the loud bright blocks where the music spilled from the windows, a fierce economy of endearment: they called each other querida, querido, dear-one and dear-one, lavishly, constantly, the grandmother to the grandchild and the neighbour to the neighbour and the stranger, even, to the stranger, so that a person who was no one all day in the cold city could come home at evening to a block where they were dear to everyone, addressed in love a hundred times between the corner and the door. This is a sanctuary. It has no walls and pays no rent and it has saved numberless lives. Querida keeps it. Inside this column there are no shelves of objects, for the cargo of Querida is words, and words will not sit on shelves. Instead the inner wall is written over, floor to bell, in every endearment the island's many languages have devised — querida and mija and habibi and bubbeleh and mavournín and cariño and cuore mio and light of my eyes in tongues I cannot transcribe — a whole spiralling litany of the names we call the dear, climbing with the stair into the firmament, so that a child climbing Querida rises through a galaxy made entirely of affection. The children read the ones they know and ask about the ones they don't, and they learn the most useful vocabulary in any language, the words for you matter to me, and they carry them out, and they use them, and the island grows, by a few degrees each year, more fluent in tenderness, which was always the cargo most worth smuggling. A small fierce child demanded to know why we don't just call everyone dear, if it works so well. A revolutionary question, and correct. We could, I told her. There is nothing stopping us but shyness and the strange shame the cold places teach, that to call a stranger dear is to be soft, and that softness is weakness. But Querida's guests knew the opposite: that tenderness is the hardest thing to keep alive in a hard city, and that keeping it alive is therefore the strongest thing a person can do. To call the lonely dear when the city calls them nothing — that is not weakness; that is the resistance. So yes, I told her, call everyone dear. Start now. She turned to the nearest child, a boy she had never met, and said, with enormous dignity, querida, getting the gender wrong and the spirit exactly right, and the boy, instead of laughing, stood up straighter, sheltered, for a moment, under a roof of two syllables, and that is the whole of what this column has to teach.

XI. Wepwawet

From the oldest of the lands that sent its scattered children to this island comes the name of this column: Wepwawet, Opener of the Ways, the one who walks ahead and opens the road — in the old country a guide of souls, a clearer of paths, depicted as a watchful upright creature with its face toward the horizon and its body braced to push the gate. Wepwawet the column holds the sanctuary that is made by the already-arrived: the ones who, having crossed, turn back toward the water and reach out a hand to the ones still crossing. Every sanctuary needs its openers of ways. They are not the guests; they are the ones who hold the door, and the door, held long enough, becomes a column, and the column holds up a school. For the arrivals to this island were almost never met by the city, which was indifferent, or by the state, which was suspicious. They were met by their own — by the cousin who had come five years before and knew which streets to avoid and which foreman was hiring, by the landsman who let them sleep on the floor until they found work, by the woman from the same village who appeared at the dock as if summoned and said, in the home language, the four words that are the foundation of every diaspora: come, I know someone. Wepwawet keeps these

openers, the unsung infrastructure of arrival, the network of reaching hands that the official maps never showed because it was made of relation, not of roads. The shelves hold their tools: the address written on a scrap and passed hand to hand, the key lent to a stranger, the loan that was never quite repaid and was never meant to be, the bed made up on the floor for the next one and the next.

I built Wepwawet near the door of the hall, for obvious reasons, and I made its own door the widest of the twenty-four, wide enough for two abreast, because the opener of ways never comes through alone; they come through bringing someone. And here is the mechanism I am proudest of in the whole building, simpler than Vesper's turning stars or Maïsha's tuned overtones: the door of Wepwawet cannot be opened from inside by one person. It is weighted so. To leave the column you must either have someone outside pull as you push, or you must turn and hold it for the person behind you, so that the only way out of Wepwawet is together — the only way to leave the column of the path-opener is to open the path for another. The children discover this with shrieks of delight and outrage. They cannot get out alone! They must hold the door! And in the holding, laughing, exasperated, they learn in their bodies the law that the diaspora learned in its bones: you got here because someone held the door; you do not get to leave without holding it for the next. A grave child asked me whether the openers of ways ever got tired. Always, I said. It is exhausting to be the one who knows the city for everyone who doesn't, the one whose phone rings at midnight in the old language, the one expected to find the lawyer, the job, the room, the loan, forever, because you came first. The openers of ways are tired unto death and they open the way anyway, and that is their particular sanctity, dimmer and more constant than the bright arrival of the rescued — the long grey holy patience of the one who holds the door for thirty years. I built them a column the colour of morning because no one else ever built them anything. When you grow up, I told the grave child, you will likely be an opener of ways for someone — a younger one, a newer one, a more lost one. It will tire you. Do it anyway. And come back here, and put your tired hand on Wepwawet, and know that the building knows what you did, and is, in part, standing because of it.

XII. Solace

And now the column I promised the two-named child, the column nearest my own heart, the one whose story is, in the way these things are true, my own. Solace means comfort, the easing of grief — but it holds in this hall a particular comfort: the comfort of the chosen name, the name a person gives themselves when no inherited name will fit, the name that is not the grandmother's and not the clerk's but the soul's own, declared, against resistance, into being. Solace is the column of those who came to this island fleeing not a country but a certainty — the certainty, pronounced over them at birth by people who could not have known, about who they were and what they were allowed to be — and who found here, in the loud forgiving anonymity of the city, the room at last to set that certainty down and become, instead, themselves. There has always been, on this island, a quarter where the rules of the elsewhere did not reach — a tangle of older streets, west and a little north of where we stand, where the grid loses its nerve and the ways run crooked, and where, for two hundred years and more, the ones who could not be themselves at home came to be themselves at last. They came from the farm towns and the firm families and the places where everyone knew them as the thing they were not; they came across no ocean but a distance just as wide, the distance between the assigned self and the true one; and they found each other here, in the crooked streets, in the back

rooms and the cafés and the chosen families, and they took new names, and they wore the clothes that were theirs, and they loved as they were made to love, and they called it, rightly, coming out — which is an arrival like any in this hall, a crossing of water to a place that, against all odds, made room. Solace keeps them. Solace keeps the chosen name. I will tell you, since the catalogue is a confession and this is its truest page, that I am one of Solace's guests. I was given a name and a certainty at my birth, and I carried them a long way, and they did not fit, the way a beautiful coat made for someone else does not fit, binding at the shoulders, gaping at the heart. And I came — not across an ocean, but across the same wide water all of Solace's guests have crossed — to a place and a people who let me set the certainty down. I chose my own name. I became a third upright thing, neither the one nor the other, bearing weight in two directions and calling it balance. And the relief of it, the solace, was so total that I have spent my life since trying to build that relief into something other people could walk into — which is, in the end, what this whole yellow hall is: the solace I found, made structural, made load-bearing, made large enough for forty children at a time to stand inside and feel, perhaps without knowing why, that here they will be allowed to be whoever they turn out to be. The shelves of Solace hold chosen names — only first names, only the chosen ones, written by the choosers themselves on small cards, a registry of self-declaration that any visitor may add to, so that the column fills, year on year, with the names people gave themselves when no given name would do. And the two-named child, when we reached this column, looked at the cards a long time, and then looked at me, and asked the question I had promised her the answer to: how did you know it was your real name? Because when I said it, I told her, I felt the coat fit. Because I stopped binding at the shoulders. Because the certainty I had carried so far finally got to be set down, here, in a city that did not care what I had been told to be, and a name I made myself rose up to take its place, and it was — there is the old word again, and it is exact — bashert. Meant. The truest names are not always the ones we are given. Sometimes the truest name is the one we arrive at, across whatever water, and choose, and say aloud, and finally, gladly, answer to. She nodded. Then she took a card, and she wrote on it not her school name and not her grandmother's name but a third name, one I had never heard, a name she had perhaps just that moment chosen, and she shelved it in Solace, and she did not tell me what it was, and she was right not to. Some sanctuaries you keep even from the Teller.

Interlude

On Being Called the Right Thing After Solace the children were unusually quiet, the way they are after they have witnessed something true happen to one of their own, and a thoughtful boy walked beside me a while before he asked: "Is it hard to change your name? Do people get mad?" Sometimes, I told him. Some people get mad when you choose your own name, because your choosing reminds them that they could have chosen too, and didn't, and that is an uncomfortable thing to be reminded of. Anger is often just grief for a freedom someone didn't know they had. He chewed on this. "But it's just a name," he said. "Why do they care so much?" Ah, I said. Here is a thing worth knowing. It is never just a name. A name is the smallest house a person lives in, the one they carry everywhere, the one they answer the door of every time someone calls. When you call someone by the right name — the name they chose, the name their grandmother used, the dear-name, the true one — you are saying: I see the house you actually live in, and I have come to the right door. And when you insist on calling them by the wrong one, you are saying: I would rather you

lived in the house I picked for you. Now you see why people care so much. We are not arguing about names. We are arguing about whose house a person gets to live in. And the answer, in this hall, on this island, is always: their own. The boy was satisfied, mostly. Then he grinned and said: "What if I want to be called Spaceship?" You may absolutely be called Spaceship, I told him, with total seriousness, for the law does not distinguish between a solemn chosen name and a glad one, and a child who wishes to be a spaceship is telling you something true about where they intend to go. He laughed so hard he had to sit down. But I noticed, the rest of the morning, that he answered to Spaceship when the others tried it, lighting up each time, sheltered, like all of Querida's and Solace's guests, under the roof of being called exactly what he wished to be.

Suite the Fourth

Columns & Shelter In which we consider the columns that hold the roof most plainly — the guests who were, themselves, a shelter for others, so that a column might be defined as any upright thing that stood between someone vulnerable and the weather.

XIII. Ferdinand

There was a story the island's children loved, in a hard decade, about a bull who would not fight — who sat instead beneath a cork tree and smelled the flowers, gentle in a profession that demanded fury, and who, brought to the great arena to be made violent before a roaring crowd, simply sat down and smelled the flowers the ladies wore in their hair, until the baffled spectacle gave up and sent him home to his tree. Ferdinand the column is named for him, and holds the sanctuary of the gentle — the refuge that exists for those whose only crime is that they will not be made hard by a city that prizes hardness above almost everything. For this island has always run on a certain ferocity — the elbow, the hustle, the deal, the unsleeping competition that the place is famous for and half proud of — and it has always, therefore, been perilous to be gentle here, to be the soft one, the dreamer, the child who would rather smell the flowers than win the fight. Ferdinand keeps the gentle ones who came anyway, and survived anyway, and found, in the cracks of the ferocious city, the cork trees they needed: the quiet branch library, the back pew, the all-night café where a soft soul could sit unbothered, the park bench under the actual tree, the chosen corner where the unaggressive could be unaggressive in peace. The city did not provide these sanctuaries on purpose; it provided them by accident, in its overlooked margins, and the gentle found them with the unerring instinct of the gentle, and made of them a hidden archipelago of cork trees across the hard rock. Ferdinand maps that archipelago. The shelves of this column hold the implements of gentleness, which the ferocious city does not recognize as tools and therefore does not tax: a sketchbook, a packet of flower seeds, a worn paperback of poems, a harmonica, a pair of binoculars for watching the birds that the city, despite itself, cannot keep out. The guests of Ferdinand are the ones who refused the arena — the conscientious, the tender, the ones who would not be made to fight, who chose against all the city's urging to remain soft, and who turned out, in the longest run, to be a kind of strength the ferocious never understood: for it is the gentle who painted the city's pictures and wrote its songs and planted its window-boxes and remembered its birds, and a city is not, finally, remembered for the fights it won but for the flowers it let someone stop to smell. Ferdinand is the proof that gentleness is not the failure to be strong.

Gentleness is a strength the arena has no weapon against, because it simply, immovably, sits down. A child who I could tell was one of Ferdinand's own — you learn to spot them, the soft-eyed ones who hang back — asked me, almost in a whisper, whether it was okay to not like fighting, because everyone at his school said he should toughen up. I took him to the wall of Ferdinand where the seeds are kept, and I pressed a packet of them into his hand, and I told him: there is a kind of toughness that is just being hard, and the city has plenty of it and does not need yours. And there is a kind of toughness that is staying soft in a hard place, which is far rarer and far braver, and is the only kind this hall respects. You do not have to toughen up. You have to stay gentle on purpose, which is the hardest thing, and you will be a cork tree for someone someday — some smaller, softer soul will find you and sit in your shade — and that is a more important thing to be than anyone who ever won a fight. Keep the seeds, I told him. Plant something. Smell the flowers. Let them call it weakness. We will call it Ferdinand, and we will hold up a roof with it.

XIV. Nokomis

Nokomis is the grandmother. The name is from one of the languages of this land's first peoples, where it means just that — grandmother, the moon's own daughter in the old telling — and it holds the most universal sanctuary in the catalogue and the one the children know best, for nearly every child in the hall has been sheltered by a grandmother, and those who have not, ache for one, and Nokomis is built to be a grandmother to those, too. There is a shelter that is made of a particular old woman's particular love, and it is the first sanctuary most of us ever knew, and the city is, in its hidden anatomy, a vast lattice of grandmothers, holding up far more than anyone counts. For consider who actually did the sheltering, in the tenements and the walk-ups and the crowded rooms where the arrivals raised their young. While the parents worked the brutal hours the new country demanded, it was the grandmothers who kept the children — the abuela, the bubbe, the nonna, the teta, the halmoni, the lola — the old women who had crossed the water last and most reluctantly and who could not learn the new language and were pitied, by the busy young, as baggage. But they were not baggage. They were the foundation. They kept the children alive and kept the old tongue alive and kept the recipes and the songs and the prayers alive, and they did it from a chair by the window, dispensing the one resource the ferocious city could not manufacture and could not tax: unconditional, unhurried, total love, the kind that asks nothing and notices everything, the kind a child can build an entire self on top of, safely, knowing the foundation will not move. Nokomis keeps the grandmothers. The slab leans on her nearly as hard as it leans on Maïsha, and for the same reason: she holds up the people who hold up everyone else.

Inside Nokomis I built a chair — the only furniture in any column besides Anevay's bare bench and the comma-pods — a deep soft chair by a perforation set low, at sitting height, so the light falls just where an old woman's hands would be, on the lap, where the mending was done and the child was held and the apple was peeled in one long spiralling unbroken ribbon that is, perhaps, the original of all the spiral stairs in all the columns. The children take turns in the chair. They are too small for it; their feet stick out. But they sit in it and something settles in them, some old inherited memory of having been held, and the ones who have a grandmother think of her, and the ones who do not are held, for a moment, by the column itself, which was built, in part, to be a grandmother to the ungrandmothered, an old soft love available to any child who climbs into the chair and lets the low

light fall on their lap. The grandmothers come at the end of every visit to collect the children, and so I always try to time the morning so that we reach Nokomis last, or nearly last, so that the actual grandmothers arrive while the children are still inside the grandmother column, and there is, every time, a moment I built the entire hall to produce: the real grandmothers, in their good coats, framed in the wide bright doorway, and the children turning from the soft chair to see them, and the recognition leaping the distance — there she is, there is mine — and the small bodies launching across the pale shining floor into the old waiting arms, and the love that has held up this city for four hundred years made briefly, blazingly visible, in a yellow column, at the foot of an island, at the end of a morning. I never tire of it. I built a school to see it. Nokomis is how the building says thank you to the ones who were called baggage and were, all along, the load-bearing heart of the whole arriving world.

XV. Tindra

Tindra is a small word from the cold north and it means to twinkle, to sparkle faintly — the verb for what a star does, or a candle seen far off across snow, or the light left burning in a single high window when all the rest of the city has gone dark. Tindra the column holds the sanctuary of the small kept light: the lamp left on for the one who has not yet come home, the candle in the window that says here, this way, you are expected, the faint persistent shine that is too weak to light a room and strong enough to save a life, because the lost do not need a floodlight; they need one true small light that did not go out. You will have seen, on the old map at the front of this catalogue, the small yellow mark out in the harbour, beyond the island's tip, with the words a lamp held up. The island has long kept a light there — a great one, on a green figure, that the whole world knows — but Tindra is not about the great light. Tindra is about the small ones, the uncounted domestic lamps that ordinary islanders kept burning for ordinary reasons: the mother who left the kitchen light on every night for forty years because her son had once come home late and frightened in the dark and she had sworn he would never again find the window black; the landlady who kept a candle in the front room for any lodger out past the locking of the door; the whole quiet practice, in a hundred thousand windows, of leaving a light for someone — which is, when you think about it, the most concentrated possible act of hope, to spend your own oil through the night on the mere chance that someone is still coming and will need to find the way. The shelves of Tindra hold lamps — oil lamps, candle stubs, a child's nightlight, a hurricane lantern, a single bare bulb on a frayed cord — the homely hardware of kept light, each one having burned, once, for someone expected. And the column itself is the brightest in the hall after dark, for I wired it so that when the School closes and the great glass goes black and the children are gone and the columns stand alone in the night, Tindra alone stays lit — a small persistent glow at the foot of the island, visible from the water, left on, the building's own candle in its own window, kept burning through the dark on the chance that someone is still coming. The watchman thinks it a waste of current. I have not corrected him. He is not wrong about the current and he is entirely wrong about the waste. There is no waste in a light left on for the not-yet-arrived. It is the cheapest sanctuary there is and the one that has guided the most souls home. A child asked me, troubled, what happens if no one comes — if you leave the light on all night and the person never arrives. I had to think about that one, because it is the real question, the one the hopeful must answer or be merely sentimental. Sometimes no one comes, I told her. Sometimes you keep the light for

someone who is lost for good, and the lamp burns down to nothing, and the window stays empty, and that is one of the true sorrows and I will not pretend it isn't. But here is why we keep the light anyway, even knowing. The light is not only for the one who is coming. The light is also a promise, made out loud, in oil and current, to the whole dark — a promise that says: in this city, in this window, someone is expected, someone is wanted, the door will be answered. And every lost soul who passes in the night and sees that one kept light, even if it is not for them, even if no one is coming for them — they see that it is the kind of place where a light gets left on, and that knowledge alone has turned more than one wanderer back from the water's edge. We keep the light, I told her, so that the dark will know what kind of island this is. Tindra never goes out. That is the point of Tindra.

XVI. Eulogia

We close the suite of Shelter with Eulogia, whose name means good words, blessing, the speaking-well-of — the same root that gives us the eulogy, the good words said over the dead, but holding here a larger and more living sense: the sanctuary that is built entirely of how we speak of one another, the shelter of praise, the roof of the kind thing said. For there is a weather of words that blows through every life, and most of it is cold — the slight, the sneer, the indifference, the long erosion of being spoken of carelessly — and against that weather the only shelter is the good word, deliberately spoken, the blessing said aloud while the blessed can still hear it. The guests of Eulogia are the islanders who practiced, against the grain of a sharp-tongued city, the discipline of the good word: who praised in public and corrected in private, who spoke of the absent kindly, who said the loving thing at the moment it would do the most good rather than saving it, as the cold are taught to, for the funeral. For this is the tragedy Eulogia is built to prevent — the tragedy of the unsaid blessing, the love hoarded all through a life and then poured out, too late, over a coffin, in good words the dead can no longer hear. The guests of this column refused that economy. They said the good words early. They told the living that they were loved and admired and needed, while the living could still be sheltered by the telling. And they understood that to bless someone aloud is to build them a room they can go and stand in on the days the cold words come — for a true compliment, deeply meant, becomes a permanent shelter in the memory of the one who received it, a place to wait out the weather of every later slight. Inside Eulogia there is a strange and lovely device. The column is the most resonant in the hall after Maïsha, but where Maïsha returns your voice multiplied, Eulogia returns it delayed — there is a faint architecture of echo, tuned so that a kind word spoken inside the column comes back, a few seconds later, in your own voice, as if the building itself had decided to repeat your blessing back to you. The children discover this and immediately, gleefully, fill the column with compliments, shouting you're my best friend and you have nice shoes and I like how you laugh and hearing it all come back, doubled in time, the blessing and its echo, the good word and the good word kept. I watch them learn, without a single lesson, that a kind thing said does not vanish — that it goes out into the architecture of the world and comes back, that you live, ever after, in a building made partly of the good words you have spoken, and that you had therefore better speak a great many. An older child, near the edge of no longer being a child, asked me quietly whether it was too late to say good words to someone who had already died. The hardest question of the morning, and the truest, and I gave it the truest answer I have. It is never too late to say them, I told her; it is only too late for them to be heard by the one they are about. But listen, because this is what Eulogia

knows that the funeral does not: the good words you say about the dead are heard by the living — by everyone else in the room, who learns, from your blessing, both who the dead one was and what kind of person you are, the kind who speaks well, who shelters with words, who builds rooms of praise. The eulogy is not wasted on the dead. It is a sanctuary built, in the dead one's name, for everyone still alive to hear it. So say the good words, I told her, early and late and even at the very end and even after. They are never wasted. They are the cheapest building material there is and the only one that holds up a roof made of grief. She nodded, and went into the column, and said something I could not hear, and waited, and heard it come back to her in her own voice, and came out with her face washed clean, sheltered, the way all of Eulogia's guests are sheltered, under a roof of good words kept.

Interlude

The Grandmothers Are Sighted It was at the end of Shelter that the first grandmother appeared at the far glass — early, as the best ones always are — and a sharp-eyed child cried out, "They're coming!" and a ripple of the particular joy-and-disappointment of every ending went through the group: glad the grandmothers were here, sorry the morning was nearly done. "Do we have to stop?" asked a child who had not wanted to come and now did not want to leave, which is the usual trajectory and the one I count on. Not quite yet, I said. There are eight columns we have not reached — a whole half of the sky. We will not finish them today. You will have to come back. "Will the columns be the same when we come back?" a small one asked, with the metaphysical seriousness children bring to questions adults find merely logistical. The same and not the same, I told her. The columns will be standing in the same places, holding up the same roof, keeping the same stories. But you will be different — a little taller, a little more arrived — and so the columns will tell you slightly different things, because a story is a conversation between what is kept and who is listening, and you will be a new listener every time. That is why people return to a true sanctuary all their lives and never finish it. It is not that the building keeps changing. It is that you keep arriving. She thought about being a new listener every time. "So I never run out of columns," she said, working it out, "because I never run out of being new." Exactly so, I said, delighted, for she had said it better than I could. You will never run out of columns, because you will never run out of being new, and the day you stop being able to arrive at them differently is the day — but I did not finish, because the grandmothers were at the door now in their good coats, and the half-told suites of the Tide and the Future would keep, standing in their places, holding up their corners of the sky, patient as only the load-bearing can be, until the new listeners we would by then have become came back across the water to be told.

Suite the Fifth

Columns & the Tide In which we consider the columns that hold the water — for the island breathes with the tide, and every sanctuary set beside the sea must reckon with the truth that the same water which carried the guest in could, on the turn, carry them out, and that to be kept is to be kept against the pull of the tide.

XVII. Refugio

Refugio is the plainest-named column in the hall, for its name means only refuge, shelter, the bare thing itself, and I named it plainly on purpose, because the guests of this column are the most recently arrived, the ones still wet from the crossing, and they have no patience for poetry and no need of it. They need the plain thing the word names. They came fleeing the newest fires — the wars of this very year, the gangs and the droughts and the rising water and the old eternal certainty of someone powerful that someone powerless must not be allowed to exist — and they crossed by every means the desperate have ever used, and they arrived, and they asked, in whatever words they had, for refugio. Refuge. The plain thing. And the column holds the island's plain answer, which has not always been yes, and which this hall exists to insist should always, always be yes. For here the catalogue must be honest, as the children demand, and admit that the island's record is not clean. There were years the door was shut — shut against the very kinds of people whose grandchildren now run shrieking across this floor, shut with quotas and with cruelty and with the cold administrative language that is how the powerful say no without having to watch the face that hears it. Ships were turned back. Families were divided. The plain word refugio was answered, often, with the plainer word no, and people died of that no who should be alive, and Refugio keeps their memory too, because a sanctuary that only celebrates its successes is a liar, and the children would circle the lie in red. But Refugio keeps, alongside the shameful no, the stubborn record of every yes — every time an islander, an official, a congregation, a stranger, looked at the wet and terrified arrival and overrode the cold word with the warm one, and made room, and saved a life, plainly, at some cost, because it was the right thing and they were close enough to the water to remember that they too, or their grandmother, had once arrived wet and terrified and been let in. The shelves of Refugio are nearly empty, and this is the most affecting thing in the hall to those who understand it, for the most recent arrivals carried the least — a phone, a document folded to softness, a child's single shoe, a bottle of water nearly gone. I keep these plain poor objects under no glass and with no ornament, because they are still warm, because the people who carried them are alive and in the city now, becoming its newest citizens, and Refugio is less a memorial than a waiting room — the one column whose story is not yet over, whose cargo is still being carried up the streets, whose guests are, at this moment, somewhere in the five boroughs, learning the trains, finding the work, being met by the openers of ways. Refugio is the column of the present tense. It is the proof that the whole long history kept in the other twenty-three is not history at all but a thing still happening, today, at the water's edge, to someone who is asking the plain question and waiting, wet and hopeful, for the island to remember what it is. A child asked me, with the directness that shames all evasion, whether the people in Refugio were allowed to stay. Some are, I told her, and some are still waiting to find out, and some — I will not lie to you — will be told no, and sent back toward the fire, and that is happening while we stand here in the light, and it is the great wrong of our particular hour, and you are going to grow up into the fixing of it. She asked what she could do. The plain thing, I told her, since this is the column of plain things. When you are grown and someone powerful says the cold word no to the wet and hopeful, you will be in a position to say the warm word yes — with your vote, with your voice, with your spare room, with your hand held out at the water's edge. The island is not a fixed thing that is either a sanctuary or is not. It is a decision, made again every single day, by people exactly like you will be. Refugio is here

to make sure that when your turn comes to decide, you remember which answer this hall was built to give. Yes. There is room. Come. The light is very good.

XVIII. Ashreï

From the prayers of one of the oldest of the island's sheltered peoples comes the first word of this column: Ashreï — happy, blessed, fortunate are they — the word that opens the song of praise sung in the house of refuge, happy are those who dwell in your house. Ashreï the column holds the blessedness of dwelling — not the drama of arrival, which the other columns keep, but the quieter, deeper joy that comes after, when the fleeing is done and the staying begins, when a person wakes one ordinary morning and realizes, with a start of pure fortune, that they are no longer running, that they live here now, that this is home, and that to simply dwell in safety is, after the long crossing, the most extravagant happiness the world affords. For we make, in our songs and our stories, a great deal of the moment of rescue — the door opening, the ship landing, the threshold crossed — and rightly, for those moments are holy. But Ashreï keeps the holiness of after: the ten thousand unremarkable mornings of a life lived in safety, the school run and the shop and the prayer and the supper, the blessed tedium of the no-longer-hunted. The guests of this column are everyone who lived long enough on this island to grow bored here — and I mean that as the highest praise, for boredom is the luxury of the safe, the privilege of those whose survival is no longer in daily question, and a refugee who lives to be bored has been kept so well and so long that danger has become unimaginable, which is the very definition of sanctuary achieved. Happy are those who dwell in your house. Happy, even, are those who find your house a little dull, for their grandparents would have wept with joy at the chance to be so safely, so durably, so blessedly bored. Inside Ashreï I built nothing dramatic — no turning stars, no tuned overtones, no echo, no kept flame. I built, instead, an ordinary room: a table, two chairs, a window with the low light coming in, a place that looks like a thousand kitchens, the most domestic interior in the whole soaring hall. And it is, the visitors agree, the most moving column of the twenty-four, precisely because it is the least architectural — because after all the soaring and the glowing and the climbing, you open one more yellow column expecting another wonder and you find, instead, a kitchen table in the afternoon light, the place where a kept people finally got to simply live, and the ordinariness lands like a blessing, which is exactly what it is. Ashreï teaches that the goal of all the drama is the calm — that we open the doors and hold the lights and brave the tide not so that there can be more rescue but so that there can be more kitchens, more ordinary safe afternoons, more people blessedly bored at a table in the low gold light, happy, dwelling, home. A restless child, made impatient by the plainness of the room, asked me where the cool part was, the trick, the wonder. There is no trick in this one, I told him. This is the column of getting to stay. He frowned; staying did not seem to him an achievement. Sit at the table, I said. He sat. Now imagine, I told him, that you have run for a thousand miles, that you have been afraid every single day of your life, that you have lost your home and your country and the graves of your grandparents, and that you have crossed a wide cold water not knowing if the far shore would let you land. And now imagine that it did. And that you are sitting, at last, at a table that is yours, in a country that will not make you leave, in the low afternoon light, with nothing happening, nothing at all, no danger, no flight, just an ordinary safe boring afternoon stretching out in front of you like the rest of your guaranteed life. I watched him imagine it. I watched the plainness of the room turn, in his face, into

the wonder he had been looking for. Oh, he said, very quietly. Yes, I said. Oh. That is Ashreï. Happy are those who get to be bored in safety. May you be so lucky, and may you remember, when you are, exactly how lucky it is.

XIX. Sōlas

Sōlas is a word from the island of the west, the green island across the colder ocean, and it carries a doubled meaning that I could not resist: it means light, and it means comfort, solace, joy — the same word for the brightness and for the consolation, as if that people, who knew more than their share of darkness, had decided in their language that light and comfort were not two things but one. Sōlas the column holds the guests who came across the tide from a great hunger — a famine so total that it emptied villages and filled coffin-ships, and drove a desperate, despised, half-starved multitude across the water to this island, where they were met, at first, with contempt, with signs in the windows that said their kind need not apply, with every cruelty the already-arrived reserve for the newly-arriving, as if cruelty too were a thing one inherited and felt obliged to pass on. And they survived it. That is the whole of Sōlas, and it is enough. They survived the famine and the ships and the contempt, and they did not become bitter, or not only bitter; they became, in time, the city's firefighters and its police and its priests and its poets and its politicians and its singers in the corner pubs, and they took the doubled word with them, sōlas, light-and-comfort, and they kept lights and gave comfort, and the despised hungry multitude became, within a few generations, one of the great sheltering peoples of the island, holding the door for the next wave of the despised exactly as — this is the bitter, beautiful pattern of the whole hall — they had not, at first, had it held for them. Sōlas is the proof that the chain of cruelty can be broken, that a people met with contempt can choose, against every excuse, to meet the next arrivals with sōlas instead, with light and comfort, and that this choice, made by the formerly-despised, is the most powerful force for sanctuary the island has ever known — more powerful than any law, because it is made by the only people who truly remember what the closed door feels like from the wrong side. Inside Sōlas the perforations are cut in the shape of small flames, and the light comes through them flame-shaped and dances slightly — another mechanism I will not explain — so that to stand within is to stand among a thousand gentle fires that do not burn, light without heat, comfort without consumption, the doubled meaning made visible. The children love to catch the flame-shapes on their palms. And on the shelves are the homely relics of survival-without-bitterness: a fiddle that played at wakes and weddings both, a union card, a fireman's helmet, a book of the old songs in the old tongue that the famine nearly killed and the exiles kept alive across the water, so that the language of the green island survived, in the end, partly here, on this far rock, sung in the corner pubs by the grandchildren of the starved. Sōlas keeps the songs that the hunger could not kill, and the light that the contempt could not put out, and the comfort that the comfortless chose, against all reason, to become. A child whose own family, she told me proudly, had come from the green island long ago, asked whether the bad signs in the windows were still there. No, I told her; those signs are gone, and your people took them down, partly, by becoming so woven into the island that no one could imagine it without them. But — and here I told her the hard part, because she was old enough — there are new signs now, in new windows, against new arrivals, saying in new words the same old thing: your kind need not apply. The signs never quite go away; they only change whose name they curse. And so the question Sōlas asks your family, and every family that

survived the closed door and made good, is the sharpest question in the hall: now that you are inside, now that the signs are no longer against you — what will you do about the signs that are against someone else? Will you forget, comfortably, that you were ever the despised arrival? Or will you remember, and take the new signs down, and offer the new hungry the sōlas that was, at first, denied to your own? She set her jaw, in the way of her people, and said she would take the signs down. I believed her. They usually do, in the end. It is, perhaps, the green island's deepest gift to this one: the long memory of the closed door, and the stubborn refusal to close it again.

XX. Marigold

We end the suite of the Tide with its most luminous guest, the column called Marigold, named for the bright gold flower that the peoples of the south — the great warm lands below the river that is also a wound — strew in glowing paths upon a certain night each year, to guide their beloved dead home across the threshold between the worlds. For these arrivals brought to the island a wisdom about the last and widest tide of all, the tide between the living and the dead, and a way of meeting it that is the opposite of grey: not with black crepe and hushed despair, but with marigolds, with sugar skulls, with the favourite foods of the departed laid out in welcome, with music and laughter and the bright insistence that the dead are not gone but merely across the water, and may be guided back, one night a year, along a path of gold flowers, to the table where they are still, gladly, expected. Marigold holds the most radical proposition in a hall full of them: that even death is an arrival, even the dead are guests, even the last tide can be met with light instead of grey. The guests of this column refused, against the whole solemn machinery of mourning, to surrender their dead to mere absence. They kept them present — set their photographs on the home altar, cooked their favourite dishes, spoke to them, laughed with them, scolded them, missed them out loud and in colour — and in doing so they performed, for the whole grey-grieving city to see, a different way of being bereaved: not less loving, but less defeated; not forgetting the loss, but refusing to let the loss have the last bright word. The marigold path says to the dead what this whole hall says to the living: there is room; come; you are expected; the light is very good. It is the same sanctuary, extended past the final threshold. It is the island's welcome, made large enough to include even the gone. Inside Marigold the light is the warmest in the hall, a deep gold I tinted toward orange, the colour of the cempasúchil, the flower of the dead; and the floor of this one column is not the pale poured stone but a mosaic, laid by hands from the southern lands, in the shape of a path of marigolds winding up toward the stair, so that you enter the column treading a path of gold flowers, exactly as the dead are said to tread them home. And on the shelves are not relics of survival but relics of love-continued: a photograph with a candle before it, a plate set for someone absent, a letter written to a grandmother years after her death and never sent because it did not need to be, the writing of it being the whole point. The children, who fear death less than adults imagine and more than adults admit, grow thoughtful and then, strangely, glad in Marigold, for it tells them the thing they most need and are least often told: that to lose someone is not to lose them entirely, that love builds a path the lost can walk back along, that the dead can be guests, and that grief, like every other hard weather in this hall, can be met not in grey but in gold. A child who had recently lost someone — I could tell, the way you can tell, by the careful way she held the question — asked me whether the dead really came back along the marigold path. I gave her the answer Marigold gives, which is neither yes nor no but truer than both. Something

comes back, I told her, along the marigold path. Whether it is them, or only our love for them grown bright enough to seem like them, I cannot tell you, and the people who laid this floor would say the question misses the point. What I can tell you is this: on the night you lay the path and set the table and speak their name and cook the food they loved, they are present — present in the room, present in your mouth speaking their name, present in the smell of the food, present in the gold light, present in you, who carry them, and who are, this night, lighting them a way home. Is that the same as their coming back? I leaned close, because this is the column's deepest secret. It is close enough, I told her. It is close enough that the people who walk the marigold path each year are comforted, and laugh, and miss their dead in colour, and are not defeated. And being not-defeated by death is the largest sanctuary there is, and you have just been given the key to it, which is a flower, and which is gold, and which is bright on purpose, like everything in this hall, like the whole brave yellow building, holding up its corner of a sky that the dead, too, are welcome under.

Interlude

On the Turning of the Tide The grandmothers were gathering now in real numbers beyond the glass, and the light had shifted to the flat bright noon that means a morning is spending its last coin, and a child who had been counting on her fingers announced: "That's twenty. There's four more. You said twenty-four." There are, I said. Four more. The columns of the Future. But the Future is a strange suite to tell, because unlike all the others it is not yet finished — it is being built right now, by you, while I talk. "How can we be building it," she objected, "if we're just standing here listening?" Because listening is how the future gets built, I told her. Every story you have heard this morning is now inside you, and you will carry it out the door the way the guests carried their cargo across the water, and you will set it down, somewhere, in some life I will never see, and it will become part of what you do — the door you hold, the light you leave on, the good word you say, the sign you take down, the name you let someone choose. The Future columns are not about people who already arrived. They are about you, and they are hollow, and they are waiting, and the only way to fill them is to grow up and do the things the first twenty columns taught you. That is why I save them for last and never quite finish them. They cannot be finished in here. They can only be finished out there, by you, later, when it counts. She considered the weight of this — that she herself was the unfinished part of the building, that the architect had, on purpose, left a quarter of the sky for her to hold. It is a large thing to tell a child. But they can hold large things; that is what no one believes and what this whole hall is built to prove. "Okay," she said at last, squaring her small shoulders under the invisible slab. "Tell me the four. I'll build them later." And so I did, quickly, because the grandmothers were at the door, the four columns of the Future, into the hands of a child who had just agreed to become load-bearing.

Suite the Sixth

Columns & the Future In which we consider the columns that are not yet full — the guests who have not entirely arrived, because they are the children, and the keeping that has not entirely happened, because it is still to come — these being the columns the reader is, gently and without escape, asked to help hold up.

XXI. Quietude

The first column of the Future is the one the hurried city least expects and most needs: Quietude, the column of rest, of stillness, of the unhurried hour — the future in which the descendants of the desperate are finally allowed to be calm. For consider the engine that drove every arrival in this hall: hurry. The hurry of flight, the hurry of the closing door, the hurry of the new country's pitiless clock, the hurry passed down through generations like an inherited pulse — work, run, strive, do not stop, never stop, for the ones who stopped were the ones who did not make it. The island runs on inherited hurry. And Quietude holds the radical proposition that the truest victory of all that flight would be, at last, the right to be still — that the proper destination of a people who have run for centuries is not more running but a garden, an afternoon, a held breath, a stop. I built Quietude as a place to do nothing, which is the hardest thing to build in this city and the most subversive. There is no cargo on its shelves — they are bare, like Anevay's, but where Anevay's emptiness honours the ground that came before, Quietude's emptiness offers the rest that is to come. There is only the comma-pod, and the soft low light, and a single instruction painted on the inner wall, the only instruction in the hall: you may stop here. The children, who are taught everywhere else to hurry, to achieve, to become, are told in this one column that they may stop, that they need not become anything, that stillness is not laziness but the deepest fruit of all the striving, the thing the striving was secretly for. And they stop. You can watch the inherited hurry drain out of their small bodies, the clenched readiness of the descendants of the fleeing softening, for a moment, into the ease their ancestors crossed an ocean hoping their grandchildren might one day feel. Quietude is the column where the running finally gets to be over. For this is the future I most want for the children, and the one I am least sure the city will allow them: a future with rest in it. Not the collapse of exhaustion, which the hurried city permits, but true quietude, chosen stillness, the garden in the afternoon — the thing every arrival was ultimately fleeing toward even when they could not name it, for no one crosses a cold ocean dreaming of more hurry on the far side; they cross dreaming, however secretly, of a porch, an evening, a long calm life for someone they love. Quietude keeps that secret dream and offers it forward. It says to the children: your great-grandmother ran so that you could one day sit still; do not betray her by running when you do not have to; the highest honour you can pay the desperate dead is to live, on their behalf, the calm life they were denied; to rest is not to waste their sacrifice but to spend it, exactly as they intended. A child, fittingly, fell asleep in Quietude — actually asleep, in the pod, in the soft light, while I was still talking — and the other children began to giggle, and I hushed them, because nothing in the whole morning had pleased me more. Let her sleep, I whispered. She is doing the most advanced exercise in the building. She is resting, in a sanctuary, without fear, in the middle of the day, descended from people who could not afford to close both eyes at once — and her sleep, here, now, is the entire point of everything. It is the future the columns are for. We stood around her, forty children and one Teller, and we watched a small descendant of the hunted and the hurried and the fled sleep peacefully in a pool of gold light, and we did not wake her, and it was, I think, the holiest thing we did all morning, holier than any telling: we kept watch, in quietude, over someone's hard-won rest.

XXII. Beacon

If Tindra, back in the suite of Shelter, was the small light kept burning in the window for the one still coming, Beacon is its future and its grown form: the column of the one who becomes, themselves, a great light for others — who takes all they were given in this hall and turns it outward, blazing, deliberate, a fire kept high on a hill so that the lost across the whole dark water might steer by it. For the final lesson of every sanctuary is that it is not a destination but a relay: you are sheltered so that you may shelter, lit so that you may light, kept so that you may keep. Beacon is the column where the guest becomes the host, where the rescued becomes the rescuer, where the long chain of mercy that built this island takes its next link from the children now standing in the light. The guests of Beacon are all those who completed the turn — who, having been sheltered, built shelters; having been taught, taught; having been lit through their own dark crossing by some small kept flame, grew up to become the flame for the next. They are the formerly-hungry who founded the soup kitchens, the formerly-homeless who built the houses, the formerly-voiceless who became the advocates, the children of this very hall who grew up and came back to teach in it. Beacon is the column of the completed circuit, and it is the brightest in the hall by day, for I set its perforations widest and its glass clearest, so that it blazes with caught sun, a true beacon, visible — the harbour pilots have told me — from far out on the water, a high gold fire at the foot of the island that says, to everyone still crossing toward it: steer here; this is the place that keeps; this is the light that was lit by someone who was once as lost as you. On the shelves of Beacon are the tools of the turned — the founder's charter, the teacher's chalk, the organizer's bullhorn, the nurse's lamp, the long unglamorous instruments of people who decided to spend their lives being light for others. And there is a mirror, the only one in the hall besides the polished floor: a small bright mirror set at a child's height, angled to catch the perforated sun and throw it, so that a child standing before it finds their own face suddenly haloed in caught gold light, finds themselves, for a startled moment, being the beacon — the light passing through them and out into the hall — and understands, before I say a word, that the fire is meant to be taken up, that they are not only to be warmed by the light but to become it. It is the most important mirror a child will ever stand in front of, for every other mirror shows them only themselves, and this one shows them themselves on fire for others, which is the only image of a person worth growing up into. The child who had agreed to become load-bearing stood in the mirror of Beacon a long time, watching the gold light pass through her face. What do I do, she asked me, to be a beacon? Not someday — now. You are nearly there already, I told her, for you have done the first thing, which is to let the light in; you have listened all morning, taken the stories in, agreed to carry them. The second thing is simpler than you fear: when you meet someone in the dark — someone lost, someone newly arrived, someone being told they are not allowed to exist — you turn toward them the light you were given here, and you say, in whatever words you have, the words this whole hall is built to say. She knew them now. She had heard them at every column. She said them back to me, in the mirror, with the gold light pouring through her small fierce face: There is room. Come. You are expected. The light is very good. Yes, I said, and my voice was not entirely steady. That is how you are a beacon. You have just done it. You did it to the dark in the mirror, and the dark in the mirror was the future, and you lit it.

XXIII. Liesel

The penultimate column has a particular name, a child's name, Liesel, and a particular story, for it is the column of one child who came to this hall and did not leave — or rather, who left and returned, and returned, and finally stayed, and became its keeper, and is the reason the catalogue you are reading exists. I will tell you about Liesel, because the Future is not an abstraction; it arrives wearing a specific face, with a specific name, on a specific morning, and walks across the specific floor, and changes everything, quietly, by growing up. Liesel came to the School as a small child, in the white and the pink, on a morning like this one, brought by a grandmother who had herself crossed a cold water fleeing a grey certainty. And Liesel was a listener of the rare deep kind — the kind who does not chase her reflection across the floor but stands very still at each column, taking it in, letting it change her — and she came back, year on year, a new listener every time, exactly as the columns intend, until she was too old for the white and the pink, and then she came back as a young person and asked to help, and then she came back as a grown one and asked to teach, and now Liesel keeps the lamp of Tindra lit at night and tells the morning children the stories of the columns and is teaching me, slowly, in my older years, how to let go of a thing I built so that it can outlast me. Liesel is the future that comes back. She is the proof that a sanctuary works: that a child sheltered here grew up to do the sheltering, that the building made a keeper of one of its kept, that the light got passed. I built her column, while she was still young and did not know it was hers, as the most welcoming of all — its door always open, never even latched with a story, the one column you may enter without knowing the secret, because Liesel's gift, the gift of the future that returns, is that she lowers the threshold for everyone behind her. On its shelves are the things a child loves and keeps: a first book read alone, a friendship bracelet, a drawing of the columns made in a child's hand and saved for thirty years, a school photograph, the small treasures of a childhood spent safe enough to have treasures. For this is what Liesel's column finally honours — not the dramatic arrival, not the brave survival, but the quiet miracle of a childhood lived in safety, a child who got to simply grow up, kept, in the light, until she was old enough to keep others. The greatest thing a sanctuary can produce is not a survivor. It is a child who never had to be one, who grew up so safely that she had attention to spare for the safety of others. Liesel is that child. Every one of you could be. Liesel was at the door now, in fact — she had come to help bring the children to their grandmothers — and the child who had agreed to be load-bearing saw her, and saw the way Liesel and I looked at each other, the keeper and the keeper-to-be, and understood, I think, the whole shape of it: that the woman at the door had once stood exactly where she stood, a small listener in pink and white, and had grown into the holder of the light, and that this was not a story about the past at all but a set of instructions for her own life, should she choose to follow them. "Was she really me?" the child asked — meaning, was Liesel once a child like her — but the question came out in the present tense, was she really me, and I did not correct the grammar, because the grammar was true. Yes, I told her. She was really you. And you are really her. That is what this column is for. It is the one place in the hall where the future and the past are the same person, standing in the doorway, holding the light, having grown up safe enough to give it away.

XXIV. Threshold

And so to the last column, which is not, in the end, a column at all. Threshold is hollow all the way through — not merely hollow within, like its twenty-three siblings, but open at both ends, top and bottom, front and back, a column that has so completely become an opening that it is less a support than a door that learned to bear weight. You can see straight through it to the harbour beyond. The wind moves through it. It holds up its corner of the slab while refusing, utterly, to enclose anything — and this paradox, that the thing which encloses nothing still holds up the sky, is the final teaching of the hall, the secret the whole catalogue has been walking toward, sunwise, all morning long. For what is a sanctuary, finally? Not a fortress — a fortress encloses, and keeps out, and a sanctuary that only keeps out has become the very thing its guests once fled. No: a true sanctuary is a threshold, a place defined not by its walls but by its openings, a structure whose entire purpose is to be crossed — crossed inward by the arriving, crossed outward by the arrived-and-strengthened, crossed and crossed again by the endless tide of the coming and the going, holding up its shelter not in order to trap anyone inside but in order to make the crossing safe. Threshold is the column that understands this completely. It encloses no one. It keeps no cargo, for it is open at both ends and the wind would only carry it off. It keeps, instead, the passage itself — the holy fact of the doorway, the moment of crossing, the instant when someone who was outside steps through and becomes someone who is welcome. That instant is the whole island. Threshold holds it up. Through Threshold, if you stand at the right place at the right hour, you can see clear out across the harbour to the open water beyond, to the grey line where the next ships are always, even now, coming — and the children love to stand inside the open column and look out at the sea and the sky framed by the yellow, and feel the harbour wind move through, and understand, without my saying it, that the building is not finished, that the tide has not stopped, that someone is always, at this very moment, out there on the water, crossing toward the island, asking the plain question, hoping for the warm answer. Threshold is the column that faces the future and holds the door open to it. It is hollow all the way through because the future must be allowed to pass; it is yellow because the welcome must be visible from the water; it is a door that bears weight because that, in the end, is the definition of every good thing in this hall and on this island and perhaps in any human heart worth living in — a door that bears weight, an opening that holds up a sky, a way that is kept open at some cost, for the next one coming, whoever they turn out to be. I always end at Threshold, with the children gathered in the open column, the harbour wind in their hair, the sea framed in gold before them, and I always say the same last thing, and I will say it to you now, who have walked the whole catalogue with me and are, therefore, about to cross back out through the threshold of this book into your own life. The hall is not the sanctuary, I tell them. The hall is only a place that teaches the sanctuary. The real sanctuary is the one you will build, out there, with your life — out of the doors you hold and the lights you leave on and the good words you say and the names you let people choose and the room you make, gladly, conspicuously, in the brave colour, for whoever comes to you across whatever water asking the plain question. You are the columns now. You are what holds up the sky. Go and be hollow all the way through — open at both ends, keeping nothing, holding everything — a threshold, a door that bears weight, a way kept open for the next. And then they run out through the open column, laughing, into the arms of their grandmothers, across the bright floor that gives the light back, and the morning is over, and the sky, I notice every time, is still up there, held.

Closing Frame: The Grandmothers Come And then the grandmothers came, as they always come, in their good coats, framed in the wide bright doorway of the hall, and the morning broke apart the way a held note finally breaks — not into silence but into a fuller, looser music, forty children released at once across the shining floor toward forty waiting pairs of arms. I stood by Threshold and watched it, as I have watched it for thirty-one Septembers and will watch it, the keepers willing, for a few more. The load-bearing child found her grandmother and was lifted, though she is nearly too big to lift, and over the old woman's shoulder she looked back at me, and at the columns, and I saw her doing the arithmetic of the whole morning, fitting it somewhere inside her where it would keep. She had agreed to be load-bearing. I believe she will keep the agreement. They mostly do. That is the secret the grey world does not credit: that children, told the truth and trusted with weight, will bear it — will grow up into openers of ways and keepers of lights and sayers of good words and takers-down of cruel signs, will become, the best of them, beacons and thresholds, doors that bear weight, the next generation of the island's long stubborn yes. Liesel began the gentle work of gathering coats and matching children to grandmothers, and the hall emptied, slowly, the way the tide goes out, leaving the columns standing alone again in their pool of doubled light. I walked the spiral one last time, sunwise, the way I always do after they have gone, touching each column as I passed — Anevay first, who takes the morning; Maïsha, who sings; Pomander, who is fed by her visitors; Tacit, who keeps the wordless welcome; and on, and on, through Memory and the Name and Shelter and the Tide, to the four unfinished columns of the Future, which are never finished, which are never meant to be, which are filled only out there, later, by the children, when it counts. At Threshold I stopped, as I always stop, and looked out through the hollow column at the harbour, where the light was on the water and a far ship was, as there is always a far ship, coming. I do not know who is on it. I never know. But I know what the island is for, and what the hall is for, and what I have spent my one strange life building, neither the one thing nor the other, a third upright thing bearing weight in two directions and calling it balance. I know that when that ship lands, and its passengers come up the streets asking the plain question, there will be, on this island, because of these columns and these children and this brave yellow refusal to be grey about mercy, at least a few souls ready to give the warm answer. That is all a sanctuary is. That is all it has ever been. A few souls, ready with the warm answer, standing in a good light, holding the door. The watchman will come soon to lock the glass, and I will leave Tindra burning, as I always leave Tindra burning, the building's own small light in its own dark window, kept on through the night on the chance that someone is still coming and will need to find the way. And the columns will stand through the dark, holding up the sky, keeping the stories, patient as only the load-bearing can be, until the morning comes off the harbour and strikes Anevay first, and the whole bright hall glows up again from a floor that gives the light back, ready — gladly, conspicuously, in the brave colour, twenty-four ways at once — to hold up the sky for one more day, and to make, for whoever comes, room. — S. at Threshold, the morning over, the light still on the water

A Note on the Columns Not Catalogued

Twenty-four is not the number of kinds of person this island has kept. Twenty-four is the number of columns the engineers would let me build before the slab no longer needed any more help to stand. I want to be clear about this, here at the end, lest the reader close the catalogue believing

that the sanctuary has been fully inventoried, that the guest list of the sky is complete, that we have named everyone. We have named almost no one. For every column I built there are a hundred I did not, a thousand kinds of arrival I left in the bright unbuilt air between the pillars, and the gap between the twenty-four I raised and the multitude I could not is not a failure of the catalogue. It is the catalogue's deepest and most deliberate truth. Consider only the columns I wanted and could not fit. There was to have been a column for the ones who came fleeing not a country but a marriage, a household, a fist behind a closed door — the domestic refugees, whose border is a threshold in their own home, and who found on this island the first rooms in their lives that locked from the inside. There was to have been a column for the ones who arrived already old, too late to learn the new tongue or the new ways, who spent their last years homesick in a language no one around them spoke, and were sheltered anyway, fed anyway, kept anyway, by children and grandchildren who could no longer quite talk to them but would not, for anything, send them back. There was to have been a column for the animals — yes, the animals — for the island has been a sanctuary to more than the human, to the hawk that nests on the cornice and the feral cat that the whole block secretly feeds and the old dog walked by a man who has, the neighbours whisper, no one else at all. I could not build them. The slab did not need them. But they stand, uncatalogued, in the bright air, and you may build them yourself, in your own hall, with your own life, for the catalogue of mercy is open at both ends, like the column called Threshold, and the wind of the unbuilt moves through it always. And consider the floor. You will have noticed, in the plates, the wide pale shining acreage between the columns, where the children run and their reflections run beneath them — the empty floor, which the painter calls the most important feature of the whole hall and which the catalogue has, until now, declined to explain. Here is the explanation. The empty floor is the standing-room of the uncatalogued. It is where the unbuilt columns would have gone, and where, in a sense truer than architecture, they do go — for the floor is not empty at all; it is reserved; it is the column-shaped space the building keeps open, deliberately, for everyone the catalogue has failed to name and the sanctuary has not yet kept. When a new kind of arrival comes to the island — and they always come, the kinds no one foresaw, fleeing the newest fire — there is, in this hall, already a place for them: not a built column, which would have presumed to know them in advance, but an open floor, which makes no such presumption and offers, instead, the only honest welcome, which is room. Bare, ready, swept, and waiting. The most generous thing a sanctuary can keep is unbuilt space. So when you have read the twenty-four and feel, perhaps, that you have toured the whole of the island's mercy, go back and look once more at the empty floor, and understand that you are looking at the largest exhibit in the building — the exhibit of everyone not yet arrived, every story not yet told, every column not yet built, every kind of person the island will be asked, in years neither I nor the catalogue can see, to make room for. And understand, finally, the gentlest and least escapable implication of that pale waiting acreage: that you, too, are somewhere on it. You, reading this, have a column-shaped space reserved, hollow and ready, the light very good, for whatever it is you have carried across whatever water and have not yet found a place to set down. The catalogue did not name you. The floor has kept you a place anyway. Come and stand on it. There is room. There was always room. That is the only thing this whole yellow building has ever been trying, twenty-four ways at once and a thousand ways besides, to say.

Afterword

by Surjan

I am often asked whether the Sanctuary School is real. It is a question I have come to love, because the only honest answer is yes, and that is the least interesting thing about it. Yes, there is a hall at the foot of the island; yes, the columns are yellow; yes, the children come in their white and their pink and the grandmothers come in their good coats at the end of the morning. You may visit. The watchman will let you in if you know which story unlatches the door, and now, having read this far, you do. But the realness of the building is not the point, any more than the realness of the harbour is the point of the word to harbour. The building is real the way a sentence is real — as a made thing, pointing past itself, at something truer than itself. What it points at is an argument, and I will make the argument plainly here, at the end, where the catalogue can no longer hide behind its columns. The argument is this: that mercy is structural. That a city, or a nation, or a heart, does not have a sanctuary as it has a park or a museum — a pleasant amenity, optional, defensible only in good times. A city is its sanctuary, or it is nothing that will last. The room you make for the stranger is not a charity you perform when you can afford it; it is the load-bearing member of the whole construction, the column without which the roof comes down on your own head as surely as on theirs. I have built a yellow building to say a grey-sounding thing: that kindness is not soft. Kindness is engineering. Remove it and measure how long the structure stands. I came to this conviction the long way, through my own life, which I have not hidden in these pages because to hide it would be to build a sanctuary with a locked room in it, and a sanctuary with a locked room is a contradiction I will not draw. I was given a name and a certainty and I could not live in them, and I crossed the wide water of becoming-myself, and I was nearly not let land — there were years the door was very nearly shut against me, by people who loved me and by a world that did not — and then I was let land, by a few souls ready with the warm answer, in a city loose enough and forgiving enough and gloriously indifferent enough to let me become a third upright thing. And the relief of it did not make me want to pull the ladder up behind me. It made me want to build a wider ladder, a yellow one, visible from the water, with twenty-four rungs, each one a story of someone else who was also, against the odds, let land. For that is the choice every kept person faces, and it is the secret subject of this whole book. When you have been sheltered, you may do one of two things. You may decide that you were exceptional — that you deserved the room that was made for you, that you earned the warm answer, and that those who come after must earn it too, must prove themselves as you imagine you proved yourself, must be worthy. This is the path of the closed door, and it is taken, heartbreakingly, by so many of the formerly-sheltered, who pull up the ladder and call it justice. Or you may decide the other thing: that you were lucky — that the room made for you was a grace and not a wage, that you were no worthier than the next wet and hopeful arrival, and that the only fitting response to undeserved shelter is to spend your life making undeserved shelter for others. This is the path of the open door, of Wepwawet and Beacon and Threshold, and it is the path this book exists to recommend, with every yellow column it has. I want to say something, too, about joy, because I have made joy the center of a book about flight and famine and the closed door, and some will think that frivolous, and they will be wrong, and I want to explain why with my whole heart. The grey-minded believe that to honour suffering you must be solemn, that joy in the presence of remembered pain is a

kind of disrespect. But I have sat with the survivors — of the famines, the wars, the closed doors, the certainties — and I will tell you what they almost universally want, what they beg the living to do on their behalf: they want us to be happy. They did not suffer so that we would suffer in sympathy. They suffered so that we would not have to, and the only thing that redeems their suffering, the only thing that makes it mean anything at all, is for us to take the safety they bought us and be glad in it — conspicuously, gratefully, in the brave colour. To be grey about their sacrifice is to waste it. To be yellow about it is to spend it as they intended. Joy is not the opposite of honouring the dead. Joy is the honouring. The marigold path is the truest funeral. And so I built a school that teaches children to be glad on purpose — not glad in ignorance of the dark, for they hear the dark middles of every story and circle the lies in red, but glad in full knowledge of the dark and in defiance of it, which is the only joy worth the name. I wanted them to know that they live on a kept promise, and that the keeping is now partly theirs, and that the proper way to carry a kept promise is not grimly, as a burden, but gladly, as a gift you cannot wait to pass on. If I have done my work, then some of the forty children who came this morning will grow up to be openers of ways and keepers of lights, and they will do it not out of grim duty but out of the radical joy this hall poured into them off a floor that gives the light back — the joy of being, themselves, load-bearing; the joy of holding up a corner of someone else's sky. The catalogue is, in the end, a love letter to an island — to this particular narrow rock that has been, against its own worst instincts and despite its long record of closed doors, one of the great sanctuaries of the human story; a place built, layer on layer, out of everyone it failed to turn away; a place whose deepest nature, beneath the commerce and the grid and the ferocity, is the simple structural fact that people have always come here fleeing something and carrying something, and that enough of them were let land to make a city out of welcome. I love it the way you love a flawed and generous parent. I have not hidden its failures; Refugio and Sōlas and Maïsha keep them, sharp and unsanded. But I have built a building to its best self, and filled that building with its children, and I have told them the truest thing I know, which I will now tell you, and then let you go back out through the threshold into your own life, where the real columns wait to be built. Here it is. You were kept. Maybe not across an ocean, maybe not from a famine, but somehow, by someone, at some narrow moment, a door that could have been shut against you was held open instead, and you came through, and you are here, reading this, alive, in a good light. You were kept. And the keeping was a grace, not a wage. And the only fitting response — the response that turns your luck into meaning and your safety into a sanctuary — is to spend the rest of your one strange life being, for others, the held door you came through. Be hollow all the way through. Keep nothing; hold everything. Leave the light on. Say the good words. Let people choose their names. Take down the cruel signs. Make room, gladly, conspicuously, in the brave colour, for whoever comes to you across whatever water. Hold up your corner of the sky. It is lighter than it looks, and you are stronger, and the floor — I promise you this, I have built my whole life on it — the floor gives the light back. People ask me, too, what will happen to the hall when I am gone, and they ask it gently, the way you ask an old person anything, and I tell them the truth, which is that I do not much care — and then I correct myself, because that is not quite right, and Surjan has resolved to stop saying not-quite-right things in the years that are left. What I mean is this: I do not care whether this building lasts, the actual concrete and glass and clever yellow, because the building was never the point; the building is a sentence, and sentences are not meant to be preserved but to be understood and then surpassed by the living they instructed. If the hall falls and the columns are carted off and the site becomes, as

everything on this island eventually becomes, something that pays better rent, I will not grieve — provided the children who walked it grew up to build, out there, with their lives, the realer and unbuildable thing it was always only pointing at. Liesel will keep the lamp as long as there is a lamp to keep. After that, the keeping passes to hands I will never shake, of children not yet born, who will not know my name and will not need to, because they will have the only inheritance that matters, which is not a building but an instruction, four words long, that I have hidden in every column and will leave you with now: make room; be glad. — Surjan the hall, the lamp left burning

Catalogue of Architectural Plates & Map

What follows is the descriptive catalogue of the plates belonging to the portfolio The Atlas of Upright Things, being a survey of the load-bearing stories of Mannahatta. Of these, the first four are drawings — the Map (Plate I), the Cabinet Oblique (Plate II), the Elevation and Section (Plate III), and the Typology (Plate IV) — and the remaining thirteen are photographs of the hall itself, made on ordinary mornings while the children were at their telling. All seventeen are reproduced in the pages that follow, each with such few words as the cataloguer could bear to add; for a photograph of a sanctuary, like the sanctuary itself, does most of its work in light rather than in language, and the wise cataloguer says little and lets the reader look

PLATE I. Mannahatta: the Island as a Field of Standing Stories. Survey drawing; charcoal and gold on warm ground. The island is shown in its entirety, tapering from the broad northern hills to the southern point where the Sanctuary School is sited, marked by a cluster of yellow column-dots within a thin building outline. The two rivers are named, the harbour below, and a dashed arrival-arrow rises from a small gold mark in the bay annotated a lamp held up. Reproduced as the frontispiece of this volume; discussed at length in the Cartographic Note following this catalogue.

PLATE II. The Hypostyle Hall: Cabinet Oblique from the South-West. Paraline projection; the frontal plane shown true, the depth axis receding at forty-five degrees and foreshortened by half, after the cabinet convention. Two ranks of the belled yellow columns are seen carrying the white roof-slab above the poured floor, with the glazed curtain-wall at the right and three figures introduced for scale. The drawing is the clearest single record of how the columns stand in company — how the hall is not a row of monuments but a society of supports, leaning on one another's help to hold one sky.

PLATE II. The Hypostyle Hall — cabinet oblique from the south-west; depth axis 45°, receding 1:2.

PLATE III. Elevation & Section: the Columns along the South Walk. Two drawings on one sheet. Above, the longitudinal elevation: six columns of differing profile and aperture — the oval mouth, the arched pink door, the perforated and the twin — ranged beneath the roof-slab, with figures for scale and the height carried off in a dimension line annotated, in the painter's hand, 22 hands, give or take a song. Below, the section through a single column: the hollowed interior shown in pink poché, the spiral stair the colour of the column climbing past shelves of cargo to the perforated bell, a reader's pod at the base, and the daylight admitted, as the section-note says, as stars.

PLATE III. Elevation & section — the columns along the south walk; the room within the leg.

PLATE IV. Dramatis Columnae: a Typology of the Twenty-Four. Comparative plate; twenty-four column-profiles ranged in a grid of six by four, each numbered and named, from Anevay at the upper left to Threshold at the lower right. No two profiles are alike, the painter having insisted that a column is a character before it is a support, and that the eye should be able to tell Saudade from Halcyon at a glance, as it tells one face from another. Reproduced in the front matter under the heading Dramatis Columnae, to which the reader is referred.

PLATE V. The Hall at the Hour of First Light. The long hall seen down its library wall at the hour the morning clears the harbour: a great trumpet-column flares into the slab, the shelved cargo of a hundred elsewheres runs off to the left, and the children cross the doubled light in their pink and white, doubled again in the floor that gives the light back.

PLATE V. The hall at the hour of first light.

PLATE VI. Children Crossing the Floor. A girl in a pink the colour of an apology accepted crosses the open floor toward the column's great mouth, within which the stair can be seen turning like a told story; behind her the other children scatter across the shine, the real and their shy second selves.

PLATE VI. Children crossing the floor.

PLATE VII. The Bell, Where the Slab Is Caught. One column flares so wide at the head that it ceases to be a support and becomes a sky; the children gather beneath it on the floor that returns the light, small under the great glad weight it so easily bears.

PLATE VII. The bell, where the slab is caught.

PLATE VIII. The Oval Mouth. A long aperture opened in the side of a column-room, through which the guests within are seen at their tables; above the opening the perforations begin — the first stars of the deliberate galaxy that the noon will complete.

PLATE VIII. The oval mouth.

PLATE IX. The Arched Door of a Column. A child framed in the arched door, half in the gold interior and half in the white hall, caught precisely on the threshold; above her the wall lifts away into its galaxy of perforations, and within wait the shelves of cargo.

PLATE IX. The arched door of a column.

PLATE X. Entering the Column. Two small guests step through the arched door at the foot of the bell, passing from the bright public floor into the private weather within — the act the whole building exists to make safe, performed here in pink, without ceremony, as children perform the largest things.

PLATE X. Entering the column.

PLATE XI. The Library Within (Mnemo). Two columns stand apart to let a tall wall of shelved books rise between them — the smuggled libraries of a hundred elsewheres — with the soft pods drawn up close and the children come to take down whatever they like, asked nothing at all.

PLATE XI. The library within (Mnemo).

PLATE XII. The Reading Nook. A column flares overhead into the slab and shelters beneath its bell a pink-lit room of shelves and comma-pods, where the guests fold themselves in with a book and the perforated light falls across the open page.

PLATE XII. The reading nook.

PLATE XIII. The Hollow Shaft, a Room You May Enter. The bell of one column curls open to show the pink interior glowing within, lit from above as stars — the library kept inside the leg — while beside it a second shaft rises straight and sure to the slab.

PLATE XIII. The hollow shaft, a room you may enter.

PLATE XIV. The Open Column (Threshold), the Door That Bears Weight. A column so given over to its aperture that it has become an arch, holding up its corner of the slab while enclosing no one; its head is pricked with the galaxy, its pink interior open to all who pass, and the listeners wait in their pods just within.

PLATE XIV. The open column — the door that bears weight.

PLATE XV. The Spiral. A column whose head turns open like a question that has decided to answer itself, opening upon a pink interior where the guests are gathered; the stair, the bell, and the welcome made one continuous curving gesture.

PLATE XV. The spiral.

PLATE XVI. The Galaxy Beneath the Bell. Seen from below, the great flared head glows pink with its own perforations, a small deliberate firmament held overhead, while at the foot the soft domes wait like eggs of light for the listeners who arrive early.

PLATE XVI. The galaxy beneath the bell.

PLATE XVII. The Hypostyle Hall in Company. The columns seen together, leaning their help into one canopy, the teardrop pods clustered at their feet — not a row of monuments but a society of supports, no one of which could hold the sky alone, and none of which is asked to.

PLATE XVII. The hypostyle hall in company.

A Cartographic Note on Plate I, the Map of Mannahatta

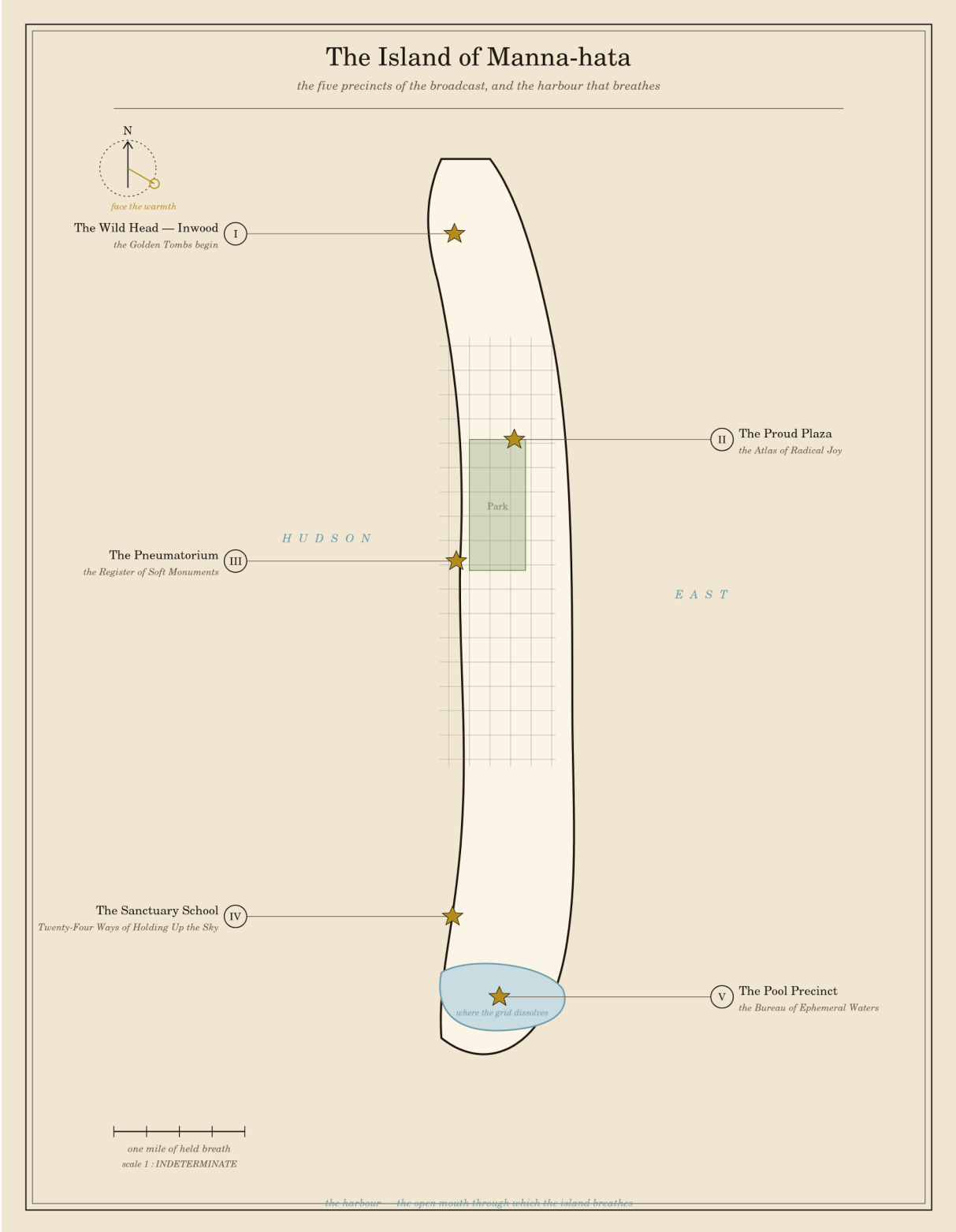


Plate I · The Island of Mannahatta — the island as a field of standing stories.

A map is an argument about what matters, disguised as a record of what is. Every map leaves out almost everything; the cartographer's whole art is in the choosing, and the choosing is never innocent.

The ordinary maps of this island choose the streets, the blocks, the parcels — they are arguments that the island is a grid of property, and they have been, for three centuries, the most persuasive arguments in the world, for the grid is real and the property is real and the maps are, in their way, true. But they are true the way a skeleton is true: accurate, and not the living thing. The map reproduced as the frontispiece of this volume — Plate I, Mannahatta: the Island as a Field of Standing Stories — argues for a different island. It keeps the rivers, because the rivers are how everyone came, and it keeps the harbour, because the harbour is the threshold the whole island is built around, and it keeps the faint ghost of the grid, because the grid is real and to omit it would be its own kind of lie. But it argues, by what it emphasizes and what it lets fall pale, that the island's deepest truth is not its property but its porousness — that this is, before it is anything else, a place reached across water by people fleeing and carrying, and that the proper center of its map is therefore not the financial district nor the midtown spires but the point of arrival, the southern tip, where the streets give up their grid and run out into the harbour, and where, on this map, the Sanctuary School is sited in a cluster of yellow. Note the small gold mark out in the bay, annotated a lamp held up, and the dashed arrow rising from it toward the island's tip. This is the line of arrival — the path along which the lamp's light falls, the sightline between the harbour's welcome and the island's door. The cartographer has made it the strongest line on the map, stronger than any street, because it is the oldest true route on the island and the one the ordinary maps never show: not a road but a trajectory, the curved bright path of coming-toward, traced by every soul who ever crossed the water hoping the far shore would let them land. The School sits exactly where that path comes ashore. This is not coincidence. The painter chose the site so that the building would stand on the very threshold the map exists to honour — the line between the water and the welcome, the place where arriving becomes arrived. Observe, finally, what the map declines to do. It does not fill the rivers with the names of those who drowned crossing, though they were many, and a more honest map might. It does not mark the years the door was shut, the quotas, the turned-back ships, though Refugio keeps them and the catalogue does not hide them. The map is, the cartographer admits, an argument for the island's best self, drawn in its best light, and to that extent it is aspirational — a picture not only of the island that is but of the island that could be, if it remembered, every day, the bright curved path of arrival traced across its harbour and chose, every day, to keep the lamp held up. A map, after all, is also a kind of promise. This one promises an island that keeps its door. The reader is invited to help hold the cartographer to it.

Provenance & Acknowledgements The compiler of this catalogue is indebted, as every cataloguer is, to sources both real and necessary, and observes the old courtesy of naming them, while noting that in a work of this kind the line between the consulted and the invented is, like the line between the water and the welcome, deliberately kept porous. For the structural conceit — the city told as a catalogue of rooms, framed by the dialogue of a traveller and a listener — the compiler acknowledges the master of the invisible cities, whose book was read until its spine surrendered, and whose method, the description of fifty-five places as a confession of the fifty-five thousand left undescribed, is the silent armature of everything here. For the apparatus of the false catalogue, the invented plate, the scholarly footnote attached to a thing that may or may not exist, the compiler acknowledges the blind librarian of the southern hemisphere, who taught that a sufficiently careful description is a kind of creation, and that the catalogue of an imaginary collection is as real as any other catalogue, all collections being, in the end, arguments about what matters disguised as records of what is. The

histories braided into the columns — the island of many hills and its first peoples; the village that was taken to make a lawn; the handful of the nearly-refused who were told let them stay, they have nowhere else; the famines and the tenements and the crooked streets where the certainties did not reach; the marigold paths and the kept lights and the long memory of the closed door — are matters of record, and the compiler has tried to honour them in a mythic register without claiming for any invented scene the authority of documented fact, and without putting words in the mouths of the actual dead, who have said enough true things of their own and require no ventriloquism from the living. Where a person appears in these pages they are a figure, not a portrait; the columns keep peoples and seasons and silences, not the private names of the real, whose stories belong to themselves and to their descendants. The Keeper of the Accession Ledger, B. Ferromonte, is thanked for a foreword written against his own better judgement, and for thirty-one years of measuring, with instruments, a gladness he affects not to believe in. Liesel is thanked for keeping the lamp, and for teaching an aging builder how to let go of a thing so that it may outlast him. The grandmothers are thanked, in their good coats, for the love that has held up this city for four hundred years and appears on no inventory. And the children are thanked above all — the building inspectors, the circlers of lies in red, the load-bearing small ones who agreed, this morning and every morning, to take a corner of the weight and stand under it, glad, in the brave colour, while the sky, against all the odds and because of all the keeping, stayed up. — S.

TWENTY-FOUR WAYS OF HOLDING UP THE SKY was set in Georgia, a face chosen for its warmth and its patience, two qualities a sanctuary requires of its type as of its people. The architectural plates were drawn for the portfolio *The Atlas of Upright Things*, in charcoal and gold upon a warm ground, after the conventions of the survey, the cabinet oblique, the elevation, and the comparative typology. The yellow is the yellow of the inside of an egg held up to a window; of a school bus; of the middle of a daisy; of the light at the exact moment the sun clears the harbour. It is, the children say, the colour of being glad on purpose. The publisher has been unable to improve upon this definition and has ceased to try. Published by The Hypostyle Press, at the foot of the island, where the streets give up their grid and run out into water.

The lamp is left burning. Someone may still be coming. The light is very good.

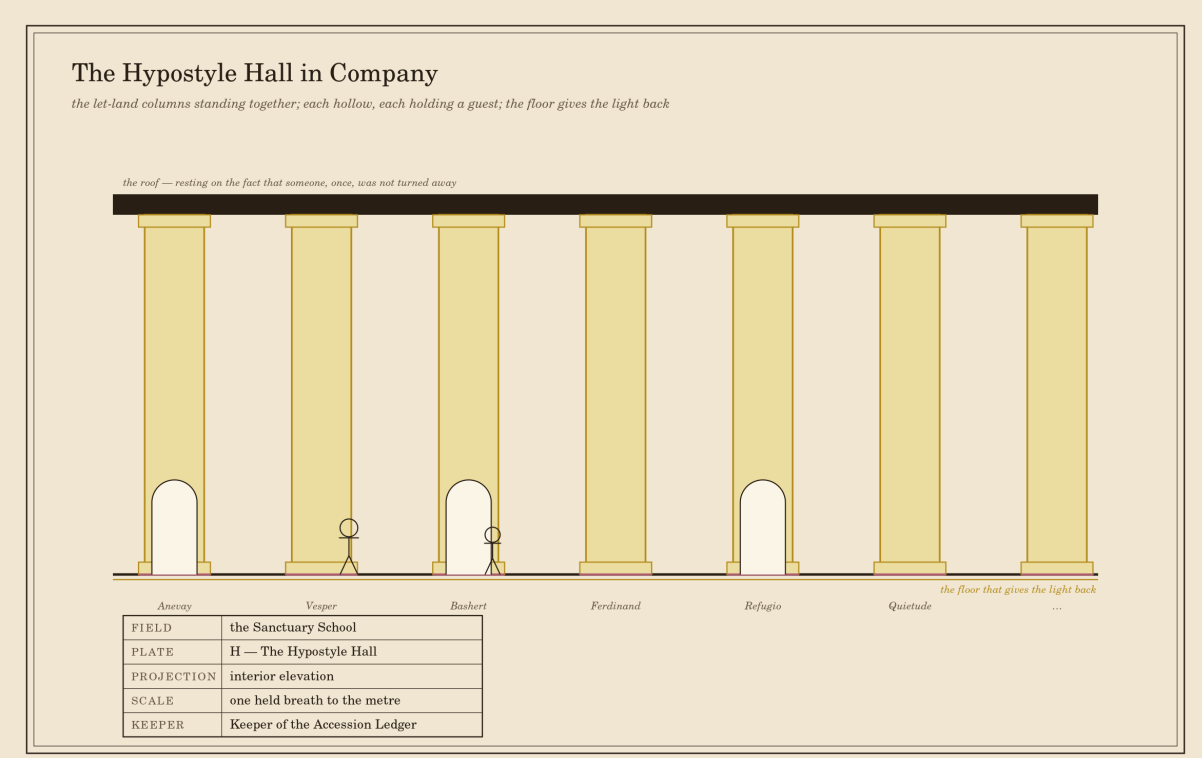


Plate H · The Hypostyle Hall in Company — the let-land columns standing together; the floor gives the light back.

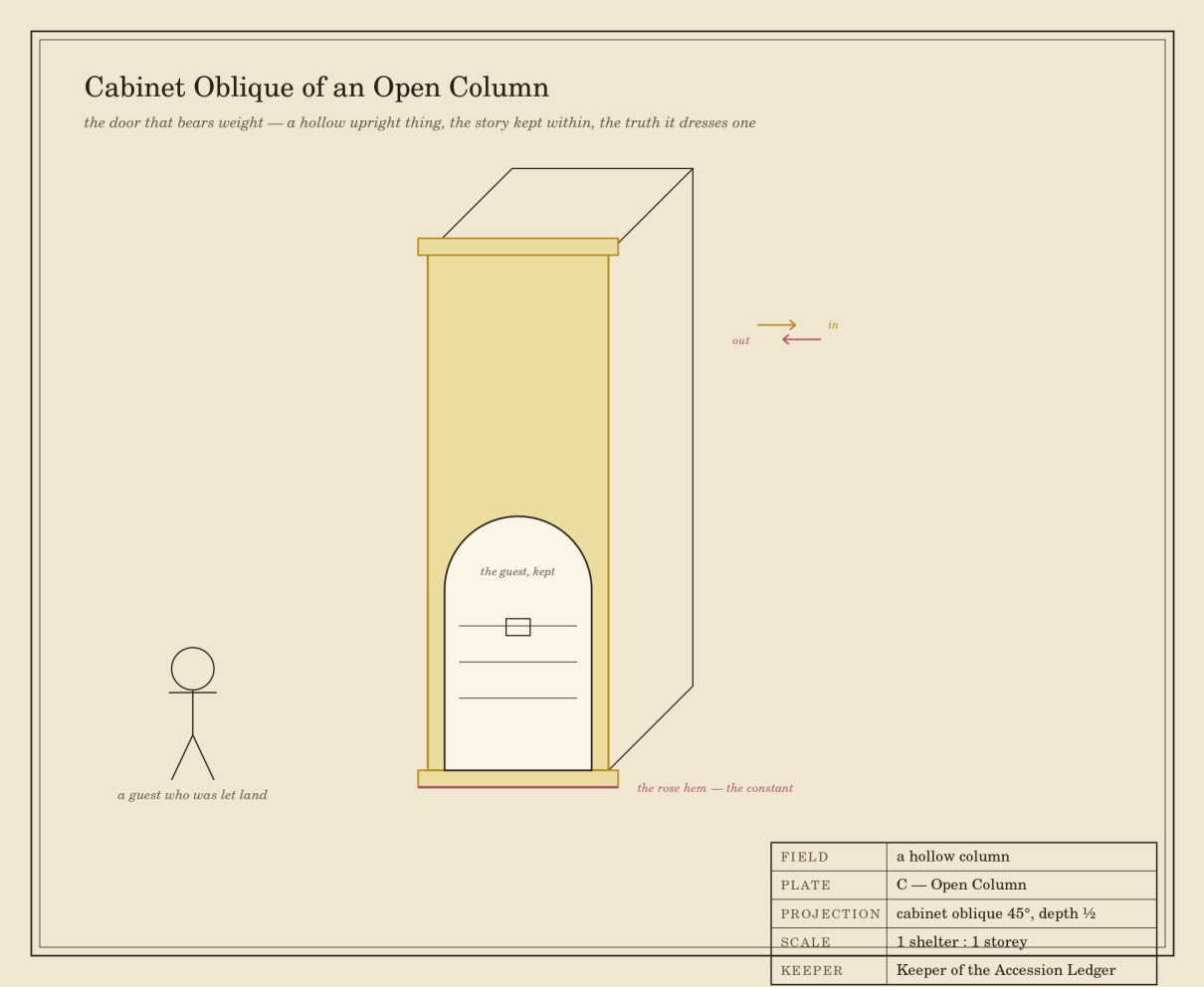

Cabinet Oblique of an Open Column
the door that bears weight — a hollow upright thing, the story kept within, the truth it dresses one
in
out
the guest, kept
a guest who was let land
the rose hem — the constant
FIELD
a hollow column
PLATE
C — Open Column
PROJECTION
cabinet oblique 45°, depth ½
SCALE
1 shelter : 1 storey
KEEPER
Keeper of the Accession Ledger

Plate C · Cabinet Oblique of an Open Column — the door that bears weight; the guest kept within.

The Column-Plates of the Source Edition

reproduced from the source edition, in the order of their first appearance

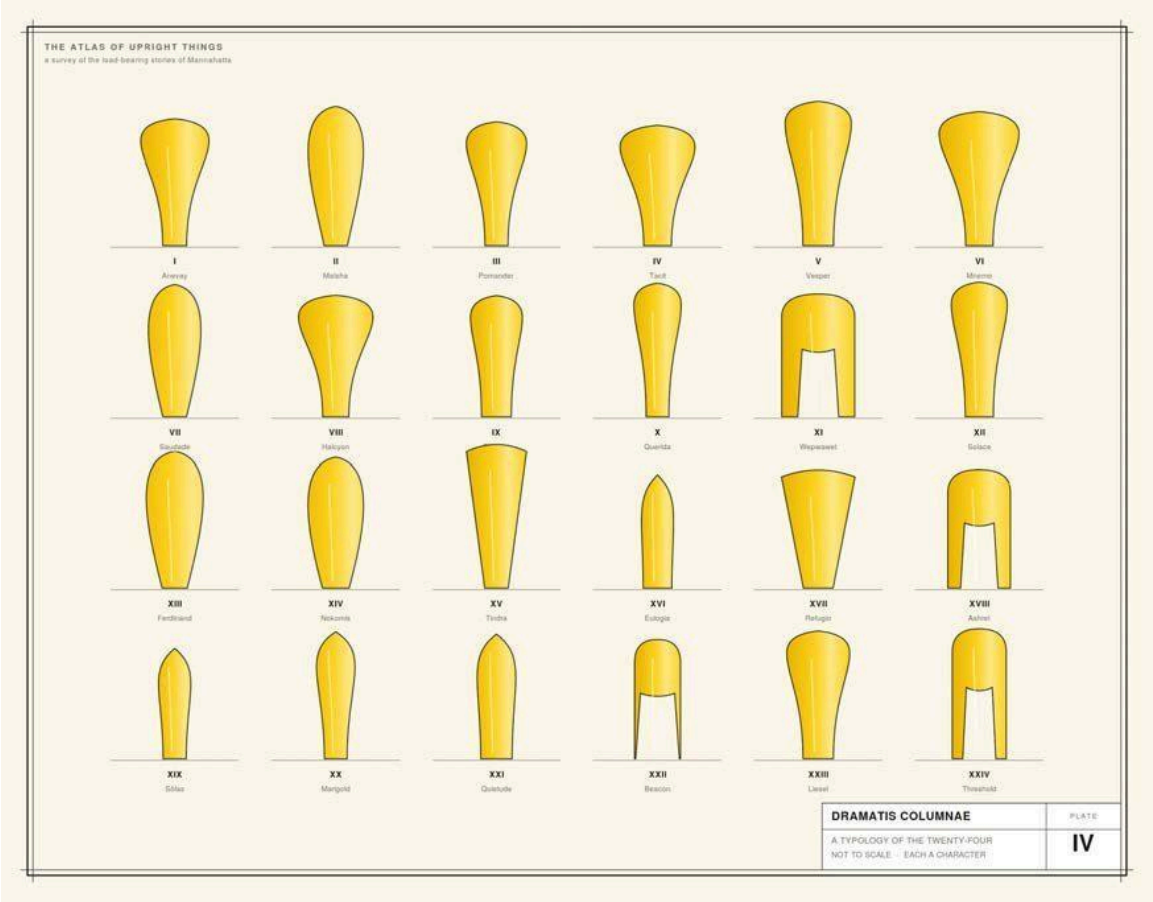


Plate of the Source Edition — 1

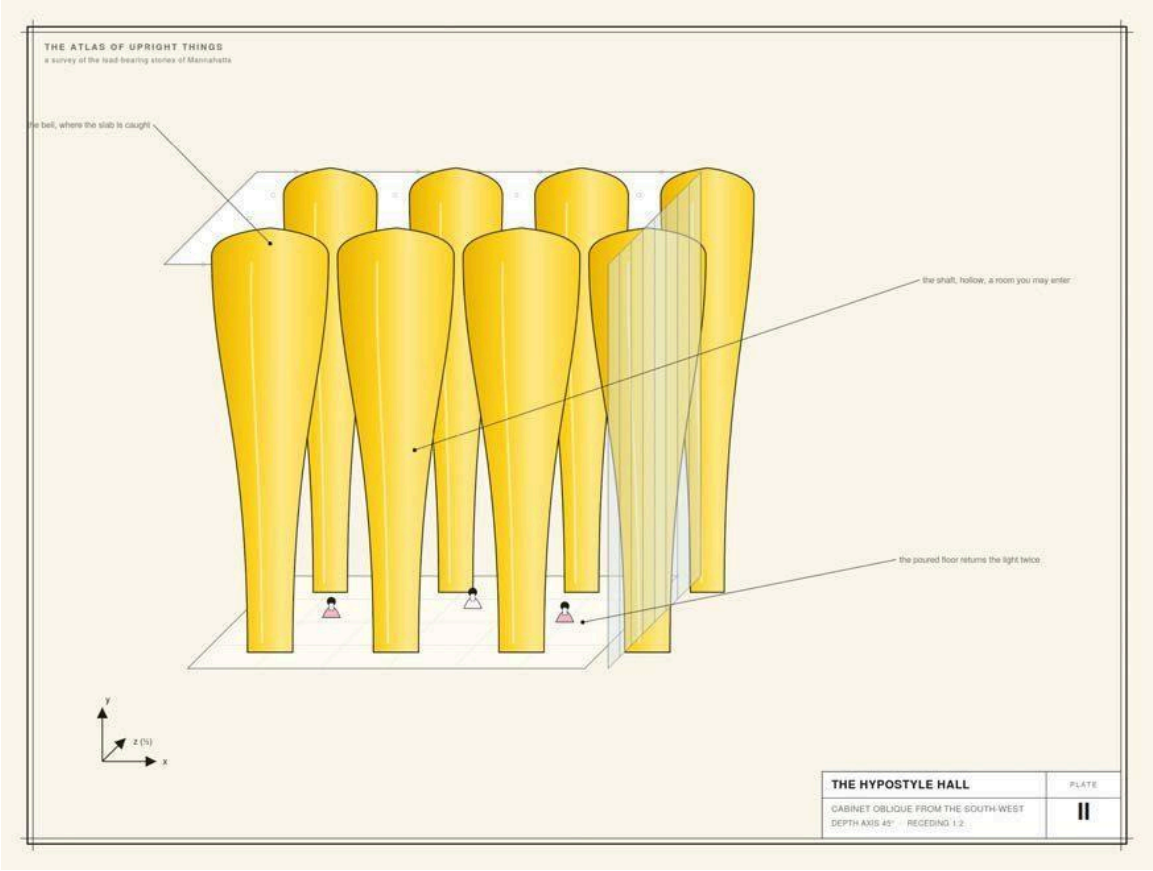

THE ATLAS OF UPRIGHT THINGS
a survey of the load-bearing stones of Mannahatta
the bell, where the slab is caught
the shaft, hollow, a room you may enter
the poured floor returns the light twice
y
z (½)
x
THE HYPOSTYLE HALL
PLATE
CABINET OBLIQUE FROM THE SOUTH-WEST
DEPTH AXIS 45° · RECEDING 1:2
II

Plate of the Source Edition — 2

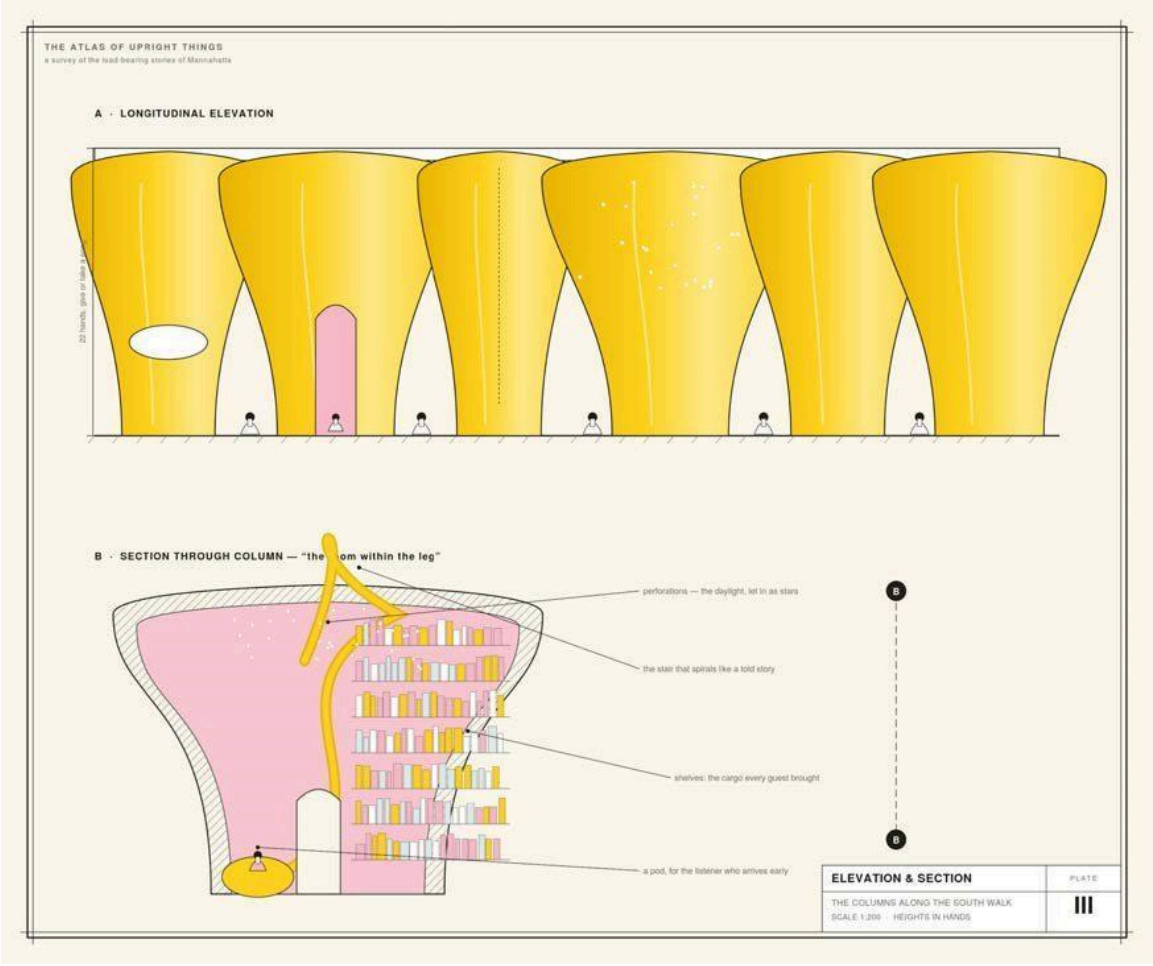

THE ATLAS OF UPRIGHT THINGS
a survey of the load-bearing stones of Mannahatta
A · LONGITUDINAL ELEVATION
B · SECTION THROUGH COLUMN — "the room within the leg"
perforations — the daylight, let in as stars
the stair that spirals like a told story
shelves: the cargo every guest brought
a pod, for the listener who arrives early
B
B
ELEVATION & SECTION
PLATE
III
THE COLUMNS ALONG THE SOUTH WALK
SCALE 1:200 · HEIGHTS IN HANDS

Plate of the Source Edition — 3

Plate of the Source Edition — 4

Plate of the Source Edition — 5

Plate of the Source Edition — 6

Plate of the Source Edition — 7

Plate of the Source Edition — 8

Plate of the Source Edition — 9

Plate of the Source Edition — 10

Plate of the Source Edition — 11

Plate of the Source Edition — 12

Plate of the Source Edition — 13

Plate of the Source Edition — 14

Plate of the Source Edition — 15

Plate of the Source Edition — 16

Book the Fifth · The Quintessence

being the Secret Book, in which the Four are Found to be One

THE QUINTESSENCE

or, The Bureau of the Fifth Precinct
the book that could not be written until the other four lay on one table

assembled from the binding of the others by
THE CONFLUENCE OF BUREAUS
under the title the Island itself supplied

There is a room on this island with no element and no address. It is not made of gold or water or breath or stone. It is made of the agreement among them to be one sky. You have been standing in it your whole life. I am only the one who finally got around to telling you its name.

— the Island of Manna-hata, to Surjan, at the last changing of the light

How this Book was Found

A secret book is not written. It is found, the way the pools are found, by going down at the right hour and taking off your shoes. This one was found on a table.

When the four bureaus laid their four catalogues side by side at the southern rail — gold and water and breath and stone, four marvels each certain it was alone — the level light of the changing hour fell across all four at once, and in the place where the four books touched, a fifth book appeared. Not on the paper. In the touching. It was made of the sentences the four had in common, which none of them had known were in common until that hour, and of the spaces between the four, which turned out not to be empty but to be the binding, the glue, the agreement, the quintessence. We have copied it down as faithfully as four tired keepers can copy a thing that exists only in the seam between their life's works. Where the seam was bright we transcribed it. Where it was dark we transcribed it anyway, on the principle, learned from the author, that the unverifiable is frequently the truest part of any catalogue.

The reader will notice that this book has no plates of its own, and this is correct. The fifth precinct cannot be drawn, because it is not a place but the relation among places, and a relation has no elevation. Its only plate is the map of the whole island, on which the other four precincts are marked, and the fifth is everywhere between them, the way the meaning of a sentence is everywhere between its words and nowhere in any one of them. Its only scale figure is you.

Proem · Surjan and the Island: The First Confluence

It is said that in their last winter Surjan walked the length of the island many times, and that the Island, which is old and has buried a great many things and is therefore not easily impressed, fell into the habit of talking with them. The other books each record one strand of these conversations. Here, for the first time, the strands are braided, because the Island, it emerges, was having one conversation all along, in four places, and only mistook itself for four.

THE ISLAND. You again. You have written me four times now. Gold at my spine, water at my foot, breath on my western shore, standing columns at my southern foot. Four books. Do you mean to use up all my materials before you are done?

SURJAN. Not use up. Use. I wanted to prove the one thing in every material you had, so that no one could say it was a trick of the gold, or a property of the water, or a sentimentality about breath, or a heaviness peculiar to stone.

THE ISLAND. And what is the one thing?

SURJAN. That the given is not the necessary. That what has hardened can soften. That a self is a draft and not a decree. You have heard me say it. You taught me to say it, the first morning a pool of you woke up shaped like joy.

THE ISLAND. I taught you nothing. I only stopped pretending, where you could see me, that I was finished. Every old thing is pretending to be finished. It is the great fashion among old things.

You caught me out of fashion, at dawn, with my shape undone, and you had the bad manners to write it down four times.

SURJAN. I had the good manners. A transformation that leaves no drawings is only a rumour. A transformation that leaves drawings is a precedent. I left you four sets of drawings so the impossible would have permission to happen again, in gold or water or breath or stone, whichever a frightened person happened to have to hand.

THE ISLAND. Four sets of drawings of one thing. You know what that makes you. Not four authors. One author, refusing to be only one thing, even on the page, even at the end. You are the most stubborn weather I have ever failed to evict.

SURJAN. Then let us do the last drawing. The one with no element. Show me the fifth precinct.

THE ISLAND. I have been showing it to you the whole time. It is the part of me that is not gold and not water and not breath and not stone. It is the part that agreed all four could be one island. Walk, and I will tell you where the four books touch, and you will see that they were always touching, and that the touching has a name, and that the name, when you finally hear it, will be a great relief and a small joke at your expense.

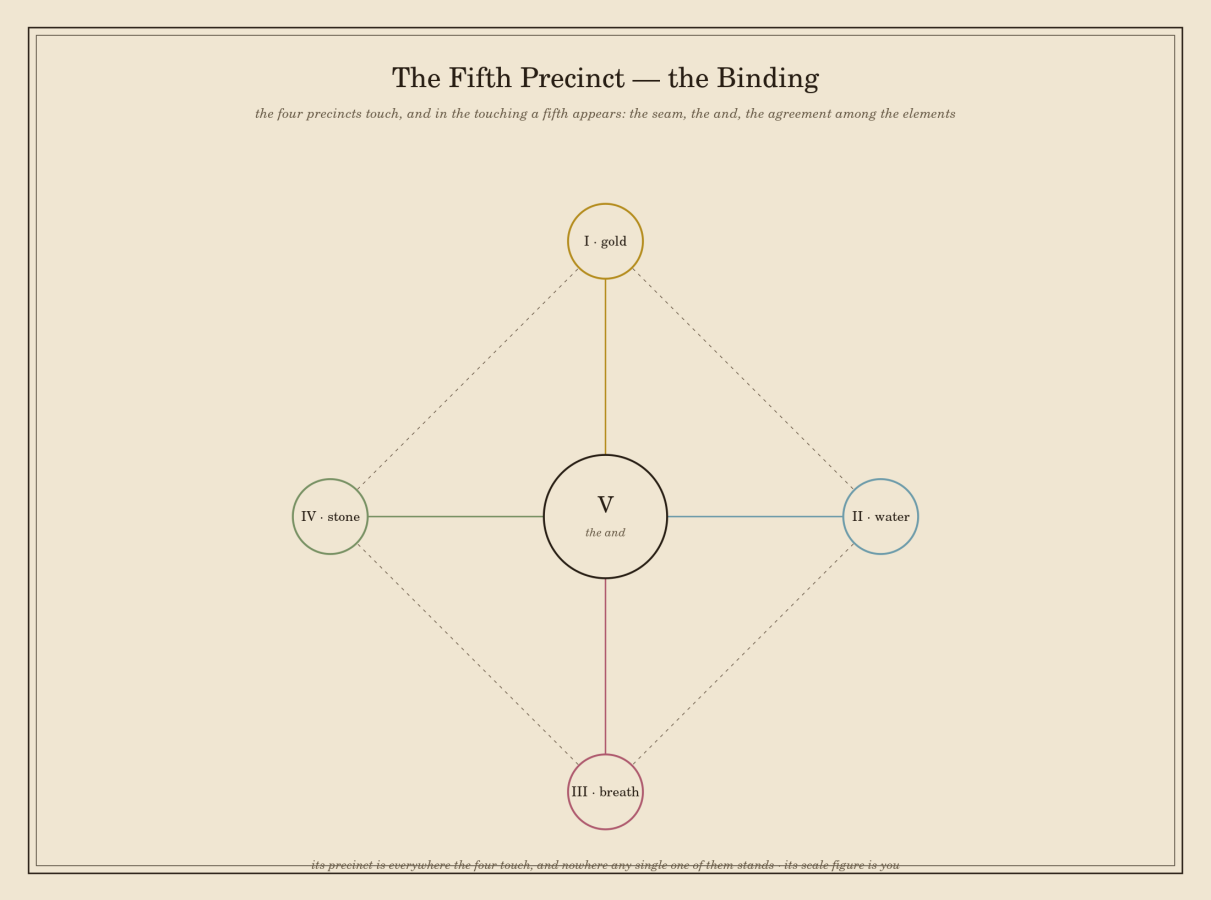

The Fifth Precinct — the Binding
the four precincts touch, and in the touching a fifth appears: the seam, the and, the agreement among the elements
I · gold
IV · stone
V
the and
II · water
III · breath
its precinct is everywhere the four touch, and nowhere any single one of them stands · its scale figure is you

Plate ✾ · The Fifth Precinct, the Binding — the four precincts touch, and in the touching a fifth appears: the seam, the and, the agreement among the elements.

A Concordance of the Four Elements

in which the four books are shown to be one argument in four materials

Before the confluences themselves, the Confluence of Bureaus sets down, plainly, the correspondence the changing light revealed — the table that turned four marvels into one. We give it as the author would have wished, in the dry voice of a customs declaration, because the impossible deserves to be reported with at least as much rigour as the merely true.

The first book is the element of fire, which is to say light, which is to say the broadcast. Its precinct is the spine of the island, its keeper the Bureau of Joyful Cartography, its marvel the ten Golden Tombs, its verb to broadcast, its argument that joy is not a private luxury to be earned after the real work but the real work itself, the size of a building, in a gold you cannot miss. Its fear refused is the fear of being gone. Its gift is that you are sent, not kept.

The second book is the element of water. Its precinct is the southern foot, where the two rivers braid and the harbour opens, its keeper the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters, its marvel the pools that re-form each dawn, its verb to swim, its argument that a self can take a shape in the morning and surrender it by night and call the whole oscillation not instability but life. Its fear refused is the fear of being unfixed. Its gift is that what has hardened can soften.

The third book is the element of air, which is to say breath. Its precinct is the western shore, where the river is allowed to look in, its keeper the Registrar of the Pneumatorium, its marvel the eleven soft citizens and the twelfth that is the room, its verb to fill, its argument that a life which was told to be smaller is here at last permitted to fill, monumentally, pink and yellow and absurd and enormous. Its fear refused is the fear of taking up room. Its gift is that there is space along the river wall, and that the space is for you.

The fourth book is the element of earth, which is to say stone, which is to say the held load. Its precinct is the southern foot, where the streets give up their grid and run out into water, its keeper the Keeper of the Accession Ledger of the Sanctuary School, its marvel the four-and-twenty yellow columns, each hollow and holding the story of a guest, its verb to shelter, its argument that the roof rests not on the concrete but on the fact that someone, once, was not turned away — that a city is the list of the people it refused to turn away, and the rest is only weather and real estate. Its fear refused is the fear that there will be no room, that you will be turned away at the threshold. Its gift is that you were let land; come, the light is very good.

And the fifth is the quintessence, which is none of the four and the agreement among them. Its precinct is everywhere the four touch and nowhere any single one of them stands. Its keeper is whoever is reading. Its marvel is that the four marvels are one. Its verb is to recognise. Its argument is that the gold morning and the water morning and the breath morning and the stone morning are the same morning, seen by four people who each thought they had woken alone. Its fear refused is the fear that you are the only one. Its gift is the table at the changing of the light, and the chair that has been pulled out for you since before you came in.

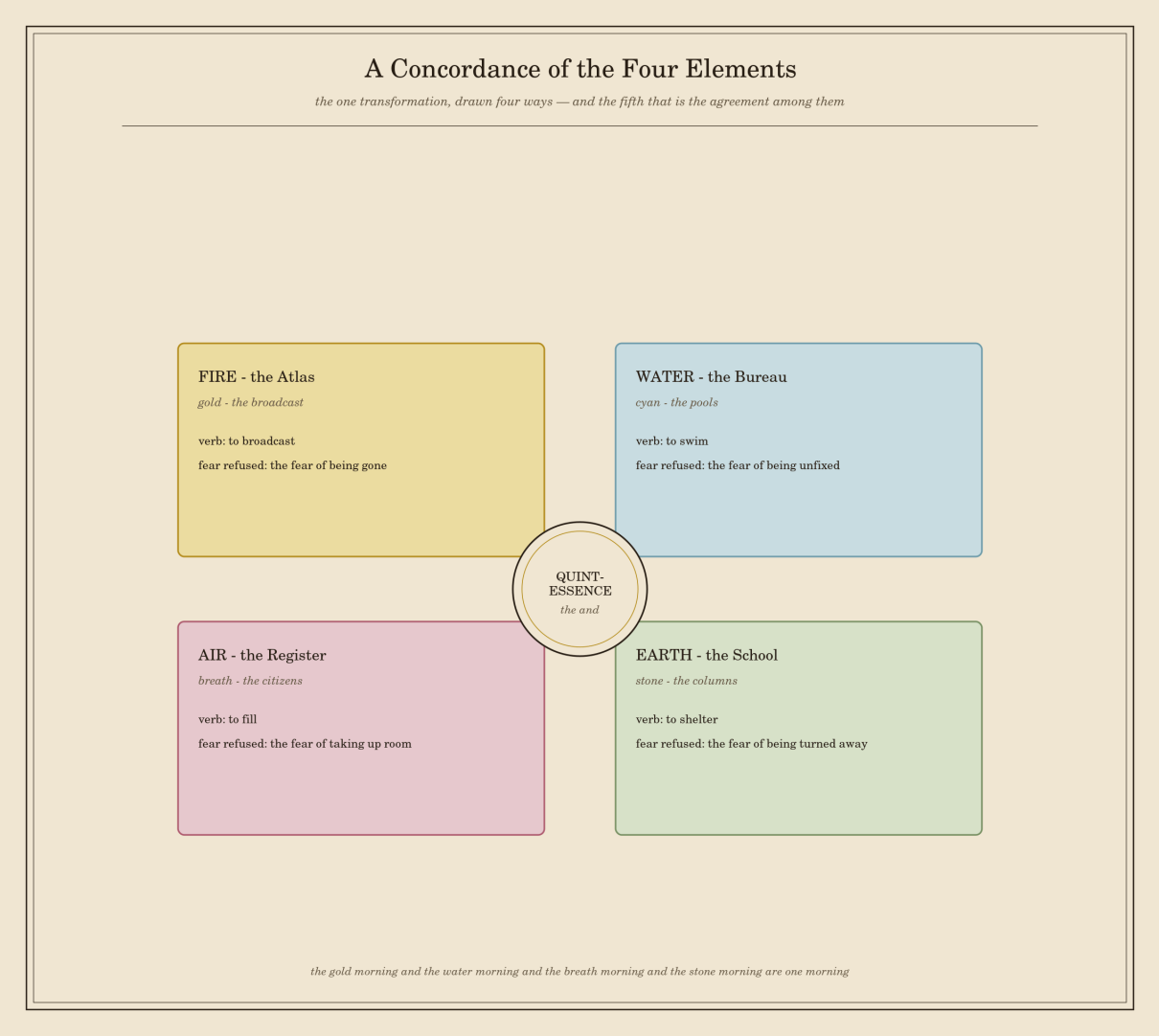

A Concordance of the Four Elements
the one transformation, drawn four ways — and the fifth that is the agreement among them
FIRE - the Atlas
gold - the broadcast
verb: to broadcast
fear refused: the fear of being gone
WATER - the Bureau
cyan - the pools
verb: to swim
fear refused: the fear of being unfixed
QUINT-ESSENCE
the and
AIR - the Register
breath - the citizens
verb: to fill
fear refused: the fear of taking up room
EARTH - the School
stone - the columns
verb: to shelter
fear refused: the fear of being turned away
the gold morning and the water morning and the breath morning and the stone morning are one morning

Plate ✦ · A Concordance of the Four Elements — the one transformation drawn four ways, and the fifth that is the agreement among them.

The Four Confluences

short bright passages, in which the marvels of the four books are found to meet

Confluence the First · The Two Mornings

There was a woman named Aurelia who, in the first book, woke for forty grey years already tired of the day, and then one ordinary Tuesday woke glad, for no reason and by no merit, and spent the rest of her life failing gloriously to deserve a gladness that asked no deserving. The Golden Tomb of First Mornings keeps her one confirmed sentence: gladness asks no deserving; that is what makes it gladness and not payment.

And there was a painter named Aurora who, in the third book, married the river at dawn and stayed faithful to it through fifty summers, and whose breath is kept in the Pneumatorium as the citizen called the Faithful Dawn, and who cured a melancholy Registrar of the fashionable grief of

registrars by telling him he had the job backwards — that a register is not for stopping things but for keeping up with them, that the faithfulness is not in the writing staying true but in the keeper coming back.

The changing light, falling across both books at once, showed the Confluence what neither woman could have known: that they had woken to the same morning. Aurelia, gold, on the wild head of the island; Aurora, breath, on the western shore; forty grey years apart and a river between them; and the morning that turned to face each of them was one morning, the planet's plain and undeserved offer, made in gold to the one and in breath to the other and withdrawn, for either of them, never. Two keepers, two elements, one dawn. The first book says the morning is not a reward for the night. The third book says come back tomorrow and bring your again. Laid on the table together, in the level light, the two sentences turned out to be the front and the back of a single thing, the way the inhale and the exhale are the front and the back of a single breath, and the Confluence understood that Aurelia's undeserved gladness and Aurora's faithful return were not two lessons but one lesson breathing — that the gift arrives by no merit, and the only worthy response to a gift that asks no deserving is to show up, faithfully, at its daily dawn, and let it be given again.

Confluence the Second · The Anchor and the Door

In the first book there is a woman named Junie who had a brother once and then for twenty years did not, and who stood one evening on the artery of homecomings, under the gold Tomb of Reunion, and was told by it that the years were not the cost of reconciling but the long way home — that the lostness is not the enemy of the homecoming but the thing that makes it a homecoming and not merely a Tuesday. She called her brother that night. The wall she had maintained for two decades turned out to have been, the whole time, a door, unlocked, with the light on behind it.

In the second book there is a pool called ANCORA, the anchor, the one the surveyor swam in when the water was cold in every sense — the morning the book does not pretend was bright. ANCORA is the pool that holds the dead at the level of the living, that does not rise above grief in certainty or in mourning but lies down level with it and anchors it and turns its face, still, toward the warmth. And there is a pool called CONFETTA, all celebration, the broad bright water that throws the day like confetti over everyone who wades in.

The changing light showed the Confluence the seam. Junie's door and the pool ANCORA are the same hinge. The reconciliation the gold tomb urges — the setting down of a weight that was only ever hurting the one who carried it — is the very thing the cold water teaches: that you do not rise above the lost thing, in pride or in grief, but lie down level with it and let it be anchored and turn, anyway, toward the warmth. And on the far side of both — past the unlocked door, past the cold swim — is CONFETTA, the broad water of the reunion itself, the helpless syllable of laughter two people make when they discover the wall was a door. Gold and water, the artery and the harbour, the brother and the anchored dead: one hinge, swinging open. The estranged person and the grieving person are doing the same brave thing, which is to stop holding the weight above their heads and let it down to the level where it can finally be loved. The Tomb of Reunion calls it reaching first. The pool ANCORA calls it lying down level. They are the same motion, and the confetti is what falls when it is done.

Confluence the Third · The Unmet Beloveds Who Hold Up the Sky

In the first book, the Tomb of Strangers — hidden in the one wood on the island built for getting lost — broadcasts to each listener the untold life of a stranger they once stood near and never knew: the tired man in the elevator who had learned the night before that he would be a father, carrying behind a perfectly ordinary face the whole luminous trembling weight of the most important morning of his life. Its gift is not that you will meet your beloved among the strangers, though you might. Its gift is that they are already beloved, every one of them, carrying whole luminous lives past you on the street, beloved and unknowing.

In the third book, the Registrar traces the inflow that keeps the twelfth citizen — the room itself — quietly filling, and finds that it comes from outside the hall: from the street, from the island, from every person who got up that morning and dared, in some small unphotographed way, to rise again as exactly and entirely themselves. You have been a soft monument all along, the third book tells its reader. You have been pouring in.

And in the fourth book — the element of stone, the Sanctuary School at the foot of the island — there are four-and-twenty yellow columns standing in a long bright hall, and each one is hollow, and inside each is the story of a guest who was let land. There is Anevay, the column of the before, the original ground that did the receiving; there is Refugio, whose very name is refuge; and two-and-twenty more. The keeper made the columns hold up the roof not by their concrete but by what is kept within them, declaring on the drawings that the roof rests on the fact that someone, once, was not turned away. They are the load-bearing faithful made architecture — the sheltered who became, in standing, the shelter — each entirely unremarkable from the street, each holding up its corner of the sky.

The changing light braided the three. The stranger in the elevator, beloved and unknowing; the citizen of the Pneumatorium, breath stored and monumental; the yellow column of the Sanctuary School, hollow and holding a guest's whole story, standing up its corner of the sky — the Confluence saw that they are the same person, drawn in three elements. The man with the shaking hands is holding up a sky; the unremarkable guest who was let land is a soft monument the city has not yet got around to inflating, and a column not yet raised; the breath pouring into the twelfth citizen is the same breath the four-and-twenty columns shelter as they hold the heavens off the heads of the people who were, once, not turned away. There is no separate class of the beloved and no separate class of the load-bearing. The crowd you walk through is a Pneumatorium not yet catalogued and a Sanctuary School not yet built and a wood full of unmet beloveds, all at once, and you are in it, beloved and unknowing and at your post, holding up your corner, pouring in. The first book asks you to ride the elevators differently. The third asks you to come back tomorrow and bring your again. The fourth asks you simply not to turn anyone away, and not to set your corner of the sky down. Together they ask one thing: that you look at the tired stranger beside you and understand that they are holding up the sky, and beloved, and breathing into the room, and that so, though you keep forgetting it, are you.

Confluence the Fourth · The Permission to Become

In the first book there is a shy clerk named Daniel, handed a name at birth the way you are handed the wrong coat at a party, who spent thirty years tailoring an ill-fitting life and then changed, in the only way change happens, gradually and then all at once and then gradually again — and the

Tomb of Becoming, which will not hold still for its own portrait, broadcasts his one hard truth: that to become yourself you do not murder who you were; the larva is not killed by the imago; nothing is lost; the dark is folded into the light, load-bearing; you wear who you were, inside out, as the warm lining, against exactly this weather.

In the second book, the pools prove the same thing at civic scale, taking a shape each morning and surrendering it by night — water that has agreed, for a morning, to hold a particular form, knowing the form is temporary and choosing it anyway, with joy, as the truest available expression of a self that is in motion underneath. And in the third book, the soft citizens are lives that were told to deflate and are here, at last, permitted to fill — pressing against the ceiling not out of rudeness but out of sheer arrival.

The level light showed the seam, and it was the rose hem. In every plate of every book there runs that one constant line at the base of every changing thing — the rose at the hem of the gold tomb, the rose band at the embrace of the breathing citizen, the rose quadrant of the breath-dial, the warm lining you find when you turn any costume of the self inside out. Daniel changing his name late, after years of smaller changes, the way the rose is the last thing you see and the first thing that was true; the pool surrendering its shape at night and keeping, underneath, the water that was always water; the citizen permitted to fill and remaining, at the lining, recognisably itself — these are one motion, and the rose is its signature. To become is not to be lost. The given is not the necessary, but the necessary is not nothing: beneath all the permitted change there runs the one thread that change cannot sever, and it is rose, and it is warm, and it was sewn in at the factory against exactly this weather. The first book draws it at the hem. The second lets it down into the water. The third bands it at the embrace. The fifth only points and says: that. That is the part of you that does not change by changing. It changes by being, at last, allowed to show.

The Last Conversation

Surjan and the Island, at the last changing of the light

SURJAN. I have read the seams. Gold and breath are one morning. The artery and the anchor are one hinge. The stranger and the citizen and the caryatid are one beloved. And the rose runs under all of it. So tell me the name of the fifth precinct, the one with no element, the room where the four touch.

THE ISLAND. You already said it. You said it four times without hearing it. The fifth precinct is the agreement. It is the part of me that decided gold and water and breath and stone could be one island. It is the part of you that decided boy and girl and promising and difficult and settle-down and be-reasonable could be one person — could be refused, all of them, and the refusing be not a void but a self. The fifth precinct is the binding. It is what holds a book together without being any of its pages. Its name, weather-person, is the same as yours.

SURJAN. My name.

THE ISLAND. Surjan. In one of the languages you were given it means the sun. In another it means the one who crosses over. You spent your life being both at once and apologising to no one for living in the unmarked water between them. That living-between, that crossing-over, that refusing-to-be-only-one-thing — that is the fifth element. The philosophers looked for the

quintessence in the heavens. It was in you the whole time, and in me, and in anyone who has ever been handed a box and declined it with enormous courtesy and no intention whatsoever of climbing in. You did not dissolve into four things. You dissolved into the one thing that was always between the four. You became the binding. You became the crossing-over itself.

SURJAN. Then I did not lose myself in the gold and the water and the breath and the stone.

THE ISLAND. You were never in the gold and the water and the breath and the stone. You were in the and. You were always in the and. The four bureaus each caught an element and thought they had caught you, and what they had caught was a portrait, true at the face and foreshortened at the depth, cabinet-oblique, courteous, partial. You are not in any of the four books. You are in the table they lie on at the changing of the light. You are the fifth precinct, and it has no address because you are the relation between the addresses, and it has no element because you are the agreement among the elements, and it cannot be drawn because the only plate it has is the whole island, and the only scale figure it has is whoever next sits down at the table and recognises that the four marvels are one.

SURJAN. And who is that?

THE ISLAND. You know who it is. It is the same one it always was. There is always room. I was at great pains to tell you so. Turn around.

The Fifth Plate · The Enrolment of the Reader

in which the scale figure is, at last, named

The fifth precinct cannot be drawn, but it has, the Island insists, a single scale figure, and it is not a mannequin, and it was observed on site, and it is you.

Turn back, if you will, to the Key to the Unified Plates at the front of this volume, and find the small standing person at the lower left, the actual visitor, come on a cold day toward something bright. In the four books, that figure was always someone the bureaus had watched: Aurelia on the last of forty dawns, the bather seen in section with her head above the warm water, the child who walked straight to the breathing citizen and climbed into the hollow and fell asleep. In the fifth book, the Confluence is obliged to report, the scale figure is unfilled. The bureaus drew the post and left the figure blank, because the fifth precinct's visitor had not yet been observed, because the fifth precinct's visitor is whoever is holding this book.

So we observe you now, and we enter you in the register, and we draw you into the plate. You came in out of some weather, on some cold day, in some condition of needing a reason. You walked the length of an island that turned out to be a single sleeping body, from the gold at its head, down past the breath on its western shore, to the water and the four-and-twenty standing columns at its foot, and you arrived here, at the binding, at the table, at the changing of the light. You are the unit. One joy to one storey; one held breath to the metre; one reader to one island. The scale figure at the lower left of the fifth plate has your face now, small, as the convention requires, but a person who came, on a cold day, toward something bright, and went home changed by a fraction we could not draw but have tried, in five books, to record.

This is the whole of the secret. The four books were a long and patient and gold-and-water-and-breath-and-stone way of getting you to this chair. The fifth book is only the moment of your sitting down in it and recognising that the four marvels are one, and that the one has

been, the whole time, addressed to you. The Island said the fifth precinct's name was the same as Surjan's, and that is true, and it is also true that it is the same as yours, because the crossing-over and the refusing-to-be-only-one-thing and the waking-glad-for-no-reason and the rising-again-as-exactly-yourself are not the property of any author, living or dispersed. They are the element you are made of. You have been the fifth precinct your whole life. We are only the ones who finally got around to writing it down.

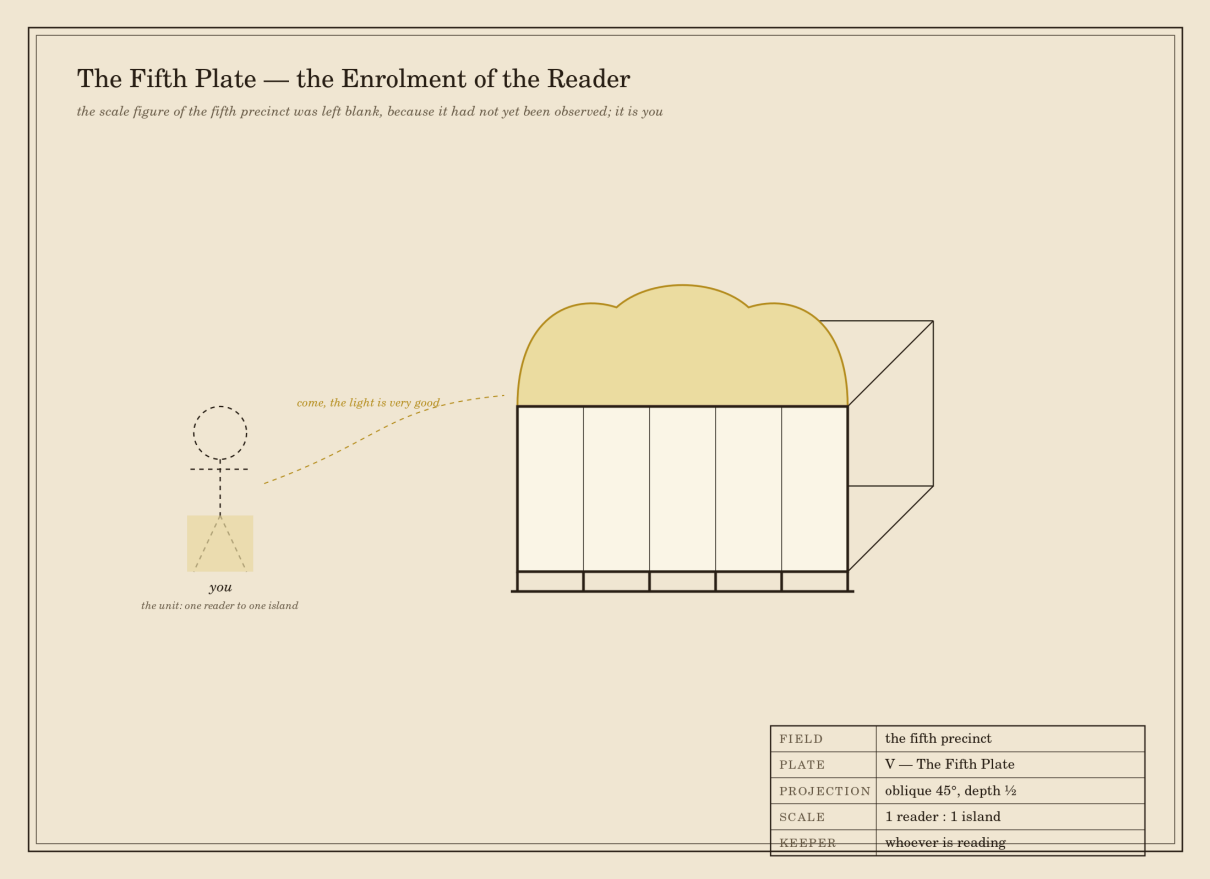

The Fifth Plate — the Enrolment of the Reader
the scale figure of the fifth precinct was left blank, because it had not yet been observed; it is you
come, the light is very good
you
the unit: one reader to one island
FIELD
the fifth precinct
PLATE
V — The Fifth Plate
PROJECTION
oblique 45°, depth ½
SCALE
1 reader : 1 island
KEEPER
whoever is reading

Plate ⊙ · The Fifth Plate, the Enrolment of the Reader — the scale figure of the fifth precinct was left blank, because it had not yet been observed; it is you.

The Keeper's Note, closing the Fifth Book

A register should know when to stop registering and let the living get back to the business of giving it new material, and a binding should know when to stop binding and let the book be read. We close the fifth book here, unfinished, because the fifth precinct is never finished — it fills, like the twelfth citizen, with every reader who recognises themselves in it, and it has just, this instant, filled a little more.

The four bureaus return now to their four marvels, gladly, the way you return to a beloved thing after understanding for the first time what it is. We will keep the gold lit and the water unraised and the citizens breathing and the sky held. And we will keep one chair pulled out at the table at the southern rail, at the changing of the light, against the arrival of the next keeper, who is reading this sentence, and who is, whether they visit the island or not, already pouring in.

— The Confluence of Bureaus, at the seam where the four books touch

Afterword

to the whole volume, by Surjan, in the season that does not end

You have walked the length of me now, if you have come this far — the gold and the water and the breath and the stone and the binding that is none of them — and I want to say the last thing in my own voice, the largest one, the one I only came into after I declined the final box.

I was afraid, while I had hands, that to be many things was to be no thing — that a person who refused boy and girl, promising and difficult, who lived in the unmarked water and crossed over and would not hold still for a single portrait, would dissolve at the end into a blur, a rumour, a smear of weather no one could love because no one could find. That was the fear. It was the only box I was ever tempted to climb into willingly, the box marked at least be one thing, so they have somewhere to put the flowers.

I declined it too, and this volume is the report of what happened instead. I did not blur. I bound. The four books are the proof: that a life lived as a crossing-over does not become nothing — it becomes the and, the seam, the quintessence, the fifth thing the heavens are made of. I am not lost in the four elements. I am the agreement among them. I am more findable now, not less, because I am the thing that holds the gold to the water to the breath to the stone, and you cannot walk any street of this island without walking, also, on me.

I will not pretend this is only joy. The water book has a cold pool in it, and the stone book is heavy on purpose, and there are names on walls in this city that I have stood before and wept, and a beacon built upward out of a grief I will not flatter you by answering. I know the nights. The whole point of building the gladness the size of buildings was that I knew the nights, and decided, deliberately, with a broom in my hand, that the last word would be the dancing. Not because there was no night. Because the night has had a century of headlines, and the joy of these particular lives — the queer dead and the queer living and the queer not-yet-born, the people the wider world spent a long century learning to spell and this island simply learned to feed — the joy had waited a long time for its turn at the top of the page, and I was the one with the pen, and I gave it the turn, and I would do it again. Again. The unit is mornings. The courage is the again.

So here is the last instruction, and then I will let you go, because an author should know when to stop authoring and let the reader get on with being the fifth precinct. Find the brightest thing on your horizon and walk toward it. It does not matter which element it is dressed in. It does not matter whether you call it gold or water or breath or stone, whether you find it in a tomb at dawn or a pool at the changing of the light or a breathing room on the western shore or a tired friend holding up your sky. They are one bright thing, addressed to you, and the walking toward it is the whole of the religion, and you were always invited, and the invitation has no conditions, and was never, not for one of your grey years, withdrawn.

I am not gone. I am simply, now, everywhere it is bright, and in the and between everywhere, and in the chair pulled out at the table, asking, with enormous interest, how you have been.

— Surjan, broadcasting from the fifth precinct, at the changing of the light

Colophon

This volume, THE ISLAND ENTIRE, gathers the four catalogues of radical joy — the Atlas of the Golden Tombs, the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters, the Register of Soft Monuments, and Twenty-Four Ways of Holding Up the Sky — together with the fifth and secret book, the Quintessence, in which the four are found to be one.

The four were broadcast, surveyed, registered, and counted by Surjan, in the lineage of two ancestors: the librarian of a southern city who dreamed in catalogues and never trusted a fact that did not branch, and the traveller who reported many cities to an emperor and confessed, at the end, that all of them were one city, and that the one city was always the one he had left. From the first, Surjan took the apparatus — the plate, the footnote, the catalogue that is secretly a labyrinth. From the second, the chapter that is a held breath, and the structure in which a book about many things turns out to have been about one thing, lovingly, the entire while. To both inheritances Surjan added an unembarrassed brightness, a sun that does not set on the argument, and the conviction that radical joy is not naïveté but a discipline, a politics, and on the right morning a form of civic engineering.

The architectural plates were redrawn in a single graphic language by the Confluence of Bureaus, in ink and gold upon cream, under imprints that do not exist and are therefore free of every constraint that binds the bureaus that do. The plates are not to scale. They are to feeling. The text was set in Garamond, an old-style letter warm enough to be read by the light of a breathing building, and composed at the southern tip of the island, in water that has not drained, by a reader floating on their back among the daisies, looking up.

Read with the soles of your feet.